***~~Charles Simeon Devotional Commentaries on Hebrew-Jude~~***

***~~HEBREWS~~***

***~~#2268~~***

***~~CHRIST'S ASCENSION TO GLORY~~***

***~~[Hebrews 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.3)~~***

"The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in Heaven."

A revelation of God, by whatever means or instrument it may be communicated, demands our solemn attention. But Christianity requires the highest possible degree of reverence, because the Messenger by whom it was promulgated, as far surpassed all other instruments in excellence, as the truths delivered by him are of deeper and more mysterious import. It is in this view that the Apostle introduces this sublime description of Christ; in which we may notice,

***~~I. The dignity of his person—~~***

We cannot conceive any expressions more grand than these which are here applied to Christ, and which set forth,

***~~1. His essential dignity—~~***

The Father is the fountain, and the archetype of all perfection. Of him Jesus is a perfect copy. As the impression on the wax corresponds with all the marks and lineaments of the seal, so is Jesus "the express image" of the Father in every particular, insomuch that "he who has seen him has seen the Father, [John 14:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.9)." But the Father is, in himself, invisible to mortal eyes, [1 Timothy 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.17); [1 Timothy 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.16); it is in Christ only that he is seen: on which account Christ is called "the image of the invisible God, [Colossians 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.15)." And as all the glory of the sun is seen in the bright effulgence of its rays, so is all the glory of the Godhead seen in the face of Jesus Christ, [Colossians 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.9). [2 Corinthians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.6).

***~~2. His official dignity—~~***

It was Jesus who made the worlds, verse 2 and [John 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.3); and he it is who upholds them by the same "powerful word" that first spoke them into existence, [Colossians 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.17). By him all things maintain their proper courses, and the order first assigned to them. *Nor is there anything that happens either in the kingdom of providence or of grace, which does not proceed from his will, and tend to his glory. There is nothing so small but it occupies his attention, nor is there anything so great but it is under his control*,[Matthew 10:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.29-30). Everything that is good owes its existence to his immediate agency, and everything that is evil, to his righteous permission.

Intimately connected with this is,

***~~II. The diversity of his ministrations—~~***

As in the Church there are "diversities of administrations and of operations, [1 Corinthians 12:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 12.4-6)," under Christ, who is the author of them; so in the work of Christ himself there is a diversity of ministrations.

***~~1. He "purged our sins" by his death on earth—~~***

Sin needed an atonement, and such an atonement as no created being could offer. Jesus therefore, the Creator himself, undertook to make an atonement for us, and such a one as would satisfy divine justice on our behalf, and put honor on that law which we had violated. For this end he assumed that nature which had sinned, and endured the curse due to our iniquities. When he had only to create or to uphold the universe, his word was sufficient: but when he came to redeem the world, nothing would suffice but his own precious blood. Other priests offered the blood of bulls and of goats as typical expiations: but, to make a true and proper atonement, Jesus was forced to offer up "himself." His prayers and tears were insufficient: if he would purge away our sins, he must do it "by himself," by "pouring out his soul unto death."

This is what Jesus undertook to do; nor did he ever draw back until he could say, "It is finished!"

He ascended to complete his work in Heaven—

The high-priest, after offering the sacrifice, entered within the veil, to present it there. Thus Jesus "passed into the heavens," the place where he was to finish his ministrations. In the presence of all his disciples he ascended thither, giving thereby a decisive evidence that nothing further remained for him to do on earth.

A further evidence of this arises from the *posture*in which he ministers in Heaven. The priests under the law stood, because they needed to repeat the same sacrifices continually: but Jesus having offered one sacrifice once for all, "sat down at the right hand" of God, the place of supreme dignity and power. From this we infer the perfection of his sacrifice on earth, [Hebrews 10:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.11-12); and are assured, that whatever remains to be done by him within the veil, is transacted in an authoritative manner, all power being given to him to "save to the uttermost" those who trust in him.

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

***~~1. The security of those who believe in Christ—~~***

Who is it that interests himself for them? "Jehovah's Fellow! [Zechariah 13:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 13.7)."

Who bought them with his blood? The God of Heaven and earth! [Acts 20:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.28).

Who has undertaken to keep them? He who "upholds all things by his word, [Colossians 1:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.17-18)."

Who is continually engaged in completing their salvation? He who is constituted Head over all things for this very purpose, [Ephesians 1:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.22-23).

What then have they to fear either from their past guilt, or their present weakness? Let them only be strong in faith, and "none shall ever pluck them out of his hand, [John 10:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.28)."

***~~2. The danger of those who are yet in unbelief—~~***

In proportion to the dignity of this adorable Savior must be the guilt of rejecting him. This is frequently insisted on in this epistle, [Hebrews 2:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.3-4); [Hebrews 10:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.28-29). Let us lay it to heart. To neglect this Jesus is such a mixture of folly and ingratitude, of impiety and rebellion, as involves in it the highest degree of criminality, and subjects us to the heaviest condemnation, [Deuteronomy 18:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 18.18-19). Let those who are guilty of this neglect remember that "the enemies of Jesus shall all become his footstool:" and let them kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and they perish without remedy! [Psalm 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.6); [Psalm 2:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.9-10); [Psalm 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.12).

***~~#2269~~***

***~~CHRIST'S INCARNATION~~***

***~~[Hebrews 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.6)~~***

"When he brings the First-begotten into the world, he says: Let all the angels of God worship him."

IF God had been pleased to try our faith, he might have required us to believe whatever he would reveal, even though he would mention it but once: but, in condescension to our weakness, he has given us a great variety of testimonies to confirm every fundamental doctrine of our holy religion. The doctrine of the *divinity of Christ* is as important as any in the whole Bible: and it stands, not on one or two doubtful passages of Scripture, but on the plainest, and almost numberless declarations of the inspired writers.

In the passage before us the Apostle is showing *the infinite superiority of Jesus above the highest orders of created beings*; and he adduces a whole series, as it were, of testimonies in proof of this point. The one which we have now read is taken from the 97th Psalm, and confessedly relates to Jesus It speaks of Christ's kingdom, verse 1; and the duty of angels, here called gods, to worship him, verse 7.

In discoursing upon it we are led to observe,

***~~I. That Christ is a proper object of divine worship—~~***

***~~The command contained in the text is itself decisive upon the point—~~***

God is a jealous God, and claims divine worship as his unalienable prerogative, [Matthew 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 4.10); yet he at the same time requires it to be given to his Son. Would he do this, if his Son were not worthy of that high honor? Would he, contrary to his express declaration, give his glory to another, [Isaiah 42:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 42.8). We are assured that he would not; and therefore his Son must be a proper object of our supreme regard.

***~~The practice of the Christian Church confirms it beyond a doubt—~~***

Stephen, when he was full of the Holy Spirit, and his face shone like that of an angel, at the very instant that he saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, addressed himself, not to the Father, but to Jesus; and that too in terms precisely similar to those in which Jesus in his dying hour had addressed the Father. Compare [Acts 7:59-60](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.59-60) with [Luke 23:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.34); [Luke 23:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.46). Can we wish for any plainer example? The Apostle Paul, under the buffetings of Satan, applied to Jesus for relief, and was expressly answered, as he himself tells us, by Jesus; in consequence of which answer, he from that time "gloried in his infirmities, that the power of Christ might rest upon him, [2 Corinthians 12:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.8-9)." The whole Church of God, not only at Corinth, but "in all other places," are described and characterized by this very thing—the worshiping of Christ, [1 Corinthians 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.2). But the Church triumphant no less than the Church militant are incessantly presenting before him their humble and grateful adorations, [Revelation 7:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 7.9-10).

Surely if worship is not to be paid to Christ, then the Scriptures are not calculated to instruct, but to deceive and ensnare us.

***~~Nor must it be forgotten, that to worship Christ is the highest act of obedience to the Father—~~***

It is the Father who enjoins it in the text; and that, not to men only, but to angels also: "He has committed all judgment to his Son for this very purpose, that all men may honor the Son even as they honor the Father, [John 5:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.22-23);" he even swears that all, at the peril of their souls, shall bow to Jesus! [Romans 14:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.10-11); and, so far from thinking himself dishonored by it, he expressly requires it, in order that he himself may be more abundantly glorified, [Philippians 2:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.10-11).

The text leads us further to observe respecting Christ,

***~~II. That his incarnation affords a special call to all both in Heaven and earth to worship him—~~***

"The bringing in of the First-begotten into the world," may comprehend the whole period of his reign under the Gospel dispensation; in which case the command to worship him is general: but if we confine the expression to the time of his incarnation, the command to worship him will be a special call, arising from the circumstance of his incarnation, and founded on it. To elucidate it in this latter view we may observe that,

***~~1. His incarnation affords the brightest discovery of the Divine perfections—~~***

The angels had doubtless seen much of the Divine glory before: they had seen God's wisdom, power, and goodness in the creation and government of the world. But *they never before had such a view of his condescension and grace as when they beheld him lying in the manger, a helpless babe*. Now also *the design of God to glorify all his perfections in the work of redemption was more clearly unfolded*. Hence the whole multitude of the heavenly choir began to sing, "Glory to God in the highest." And if their hosannas increased with their discoveries of the Divine glory, should not ours also? Have not we also abundant reason to magnify our incarnate God; and to exalt our thoughts of him in proportion as he has debased himself for our sakes?

***~~2. It opens a way for our reconciliation with God—~~***

Men were indeed accepted by God before Christ's advent in the flesh; but it was through him who *was to come*, just as we are accepted through him who *has come*. But when Christ was manifested in the flesh, his mediatorial work commenced; and that course of sufferings and obedience, which is the meritorious ground of our acceptance, was begun. It may be said, that, though we are bound on this account to adore him, the angels feel no interest in it. But can we suppose that those benevolent spirits, who minister to the heirs of salvation, and bear them on their wings to the realms of glory, feel no delight in our happiness? Doubtless they do; and are themselves made happier by their sympathy with us. If they rejoice over one sinner that repents, they also have reason to adore the Savior for opening both to us and them, such an inexhaustible fountain of blessedness and joy!

***~~3. It reunites men and angels under one Head—~~***

Christ was the Creator and sovereign Lord both of men and angels, [Colossians 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.16); but man, by casting off his allegiance to his Lord, lost also his connection with angels. Jesus however, by becoming man, gathers together again, [Ephesians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.10) both men and angels under himself as their common head: yes, he comes, as it were, to the very gates of Hell, that he may take from thence sinners of the human race to fill the thrones once vacated by the apostate angels. It is by no means improbable that the very same humiliation of Jesus that exalts men to glory, is the source of establishment to the angels that retained their innocence. At all events, the restoration of their Lord to the honor of which man by transgression had deprived him, and their communion with man in the benefits conferred upon him, cannot fail of exciting in their bosoms the liveliest emotions of gratitude. Indeed, we see that this is no fanciful idea, since it is realized in Heaven, where saints and angels join in one general chorus, ascribing "salvation to God and to the Lamb! [Revelation 5:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.9); [Revelation 5:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.13)."

***~~To enforce then the injunction we have been considering, we would say:~~***

***~~1. Welcome him—~~***

Let not his advent be regarded with indifference; but welcome him with acclamations and hosannas. The faultfinding Pharisees may indeed condemn you; but if you neglect to honor him thus, the very stones will cry out against you! [Luke 19:38-40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.38-40).

***~~2. Submit to him—~~***

Jesus comes, not merely to save mankind, but to set up his kingdom in the world. Let your hearts then, yes, "the very thoughts of your hearts, be brought into a willing captivity to him." "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish! [Psalm 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.12);" and present your offerings before him in token of your allegiance to him, and your unreserved subjection to his will, [Matthew 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 2.11).

***~~3. Depend upon him—~~***

He is that nail in a sure place on which are to be hanged all the vessels of his Father's house, [Isaiah 22:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 22.23-24). Trust then on him; and let his vicarious sufferings and obedience be the stay and support of your souls.

***~~4. Glory in him—~~***

Since he is the boast of all in Heaven, let him be the boast of all on earth. Let the frame of your hearts be joyous, exulting, and triumphant. See [Isaiah 44:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 44.23). Thus from worshiping him here below, you shall be brought to worship him for evermore in Heaven above!

***~~#2270~~***

***~~EXCELLENCY OF CHRIST'S PERSON AND GOVERNMENT~~***

***~~[Hebrews 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.8)~~***

"Unto the Son he says; Your throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of your kingdom."

IN the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Apostle's main object is to show that *the Jewish ritual was completely fulfilled in Christ, and was therefore superseded by the Christian dispensation*. But before he comes to the argumentative part, wherein this subject is regularly discussed, he shows how great and glorious a person Christ is: for, as the Jews had a high regard for Moses, and as they had received their law from God, it was necessary that they would be informed who Christ was; that he was greater than Moses, yes, than the very angels in Heaven; and that therefore he had full authority to introduce the religion which was now established among his followers, and which the Jews were everywhere called upon to embrace. This, however, he takes care to ground upon their own Scriptures. He speaks of nothing as now, for the first time, revealed to himself; but appeals to the writings of their own prophets, in proof of everything that he asserts.

The Psalm from whence the text is cited, relates chiefly to the Messiah. Whatever relation it may have to Solomon, it confessedly cannot be altogether applied to him. The ancient Jews understood it as speaking of the Messiah: and of the propriety of applying it to him, there can be no doubt. The words before us are addressed by the Father to the Messiah: and they lead us distinctly to notice two things, namely:

***~~I. The dignity of his person—~~***

***~~Many there are, both Jews and Christians, who deny that the Divinity of Christ is here asserted—~~***

Jews have said, that the word *Elohim*is applied in Scripture to creatures, and therefore cannot be justly interpreted as importing the proper Deity of the person to whom it is addressed. But to this it may be observed, that though the word Elohim is applied to magistrates officially, as representatives of the Deity, it is no where applied to any *individual*but to Jehovah himself; and that to apply it to any individual besides Jehovah would be blasphemy.

But Christians also have attempted to invalidate the testimony of the Apostle, as the Jews have of the prophet; and for that purpose would translate the words thus, "God is your throne for ever and ever." But this is to force the words from their plain and obvious meaning: nor will it answer the end which they would endeavor to attain: for the very next quotation from the Psalm asserts the divinity of Christ, as clearly as the text itself does; speaking of him as the Creator of all things, and as continuing immutably "the same" for ever and ever, verse 10-12; and just before the text, another passage is cited from the Psalm to the same purpose, saying, "Let all the angels of God worship him, verse 6." We may safely therefore affirm, that the Messiah (who is here called "the Son,") is addressed as truly and properly "God."

***~~The doctrine of his proper Deity, while it is asserted here, pervades also the whole Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testament—~~***

The very name *Emmanuel*was assigned him on this account, because he was "God with us!" Yes, truly, he is "Jehovah's fellow, [Zechariah 13:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 13.7);" even "the mighty God, [Isaiah 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 9.6);" "Jehovah our righteousness, [Jeremiah 23:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.6)." Nor does the New Testament leave this in doubt: for it asserts him to be:

"God manifest in the flesh, [1 Timothy 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 3.16),"

"the great God and our Savior, [Titus 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.14),"

"God over all, blessed for ever, [Romans 9:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.5)."

***~~This doctrine lies at the root of all our hopes—~~***

The whole scope of this epistle is to show, that what the blood of bulls and goats could not do, the blood of Christ, as shed upon the cross, has effected; namely, that it has made an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world. But is it the blood of a mere creature that could effect this? If Christ be a mere creature, what force is there in that argument of the Apostle, "If the blood of bulls, etc. sanctifies to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, etc. purge our conscience from dead works to serve the living God, [Hebrews 9:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.13-14)." What sense would there be in this, "If the blood of one creature could effect the smallest thing, how much more shall the blood of another creature effect the greatest?" But if Christ be God as well as man, then the argument is clear, and worthy of an inspired Apostle.

In a word, if Christ be not God, he cannot be the Savior revealed in the Old Testament: for of him it is expressly said, "Look unto me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is none else. There is no God else beside me; a just God and a Savior: there is none beside me! [Isaiah 45:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.21-22)."

But it is not so much of the essential dignity, as of the mediatorial dignity of Christ, that the text speaks: for it immediately proceeds to mark,

***~~II. The excellency of his kingdom—~~***

Earthly kingdoms are but of a limited duration: and, from the imperfection of all human institutions, there must of necessity be something in them of partiality and of comparative oppression. But Christ's kingdom is perfect in every respect, it is:

***~~1. In its duration, perpetual—~~***

The four great monarchies all found a termination of their power, [Daniel 2:37-41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 2.37-41); but the kingdom which Christ has established, shall endure forever! [Daniel 2:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 2.44); [Daniel 7:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 7.13-14). True it is, that the present mode of administering it will cease, when there are no more subjects to be governed, or enemies to be subdued. When the final judgment is passed, the enemies of the Messiah's kingdom will all be shut up in the prison prepared for their reception; and his subjects be exalted to those regions, where their every need will be supplied. "Then the Son will deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father, that God may be all in all! [1 Corinthians 15:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.24); [1 Corinthians 15:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.28)." Still, however, the kingdom itself will remain: and Christ, as its glorious Head, be acknowledged by all his subjects, as the one source of their happiness, the one author of their salvation, [Revelation 5:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.9-10).

***~~2. In its administration, just—~~***

"His scepter is a scepter of righteousness." Every law that proceeds from him is "holy, and just, and good." Nothing of imperfection is found in any one of them: they are alike incapable of diminution or addition. *If any one law appears too strict, it is only through our own ignorance and love of sin.* To the renewed soul, not one of his commandments is grievous: the only thing that is grievous to it is, that it is not able to obey them all more perfectly. The very tendency of every law is to make those happy who obey it: and were any man to obey the laws of Christ as perfectly as they do in Heaven, he would already in his own soul possess a Heaven upon earth.

Let anyone who is disposed to complain of the strictness of the Gospel, examine its laws with candor, and see which of them he can reduce: would he love God with less than all his heart; or his neighbor less than himself? Were he to reduce any one law below its present standard, he would so far give a licence for rebellion throughout all the kingdoms of the earth, and reason for murmuring throughout all the regions of Hell, since a lower standard was appointed for others than was ever allowed to them.

But this righteousness is no less visible in the administration of the King, than in the laws by which he governs: for in no one instance is his favor or his frown accorded to any one, but in a strict consistency with equity. On whom did the King ever frown but on account of his transgressions, or more than in proportion to their enormity? Or on whom did he ever deign to smile, but on those who humbled themselves before him as guilty, and pleaded his perfect righteousness as the ground of all their hopes? Nay, where did he ever pardon one rebel, until that rebel had cast himself entirely on the merit of his sacrifice, whereby Divine justice had been satisfied, and the law of God magnified? In earth, in Hell, in Heaven, the righteousness of his scepter is alike displayed, and to all eternity shall it be acknowledged throughout the whole extent of his dominions.

Keeping in view the general scope of the passage, as well as our own individual benefit, **we would observe by way of improvement:**

***~~1. How clearly are the great truths of the Gospel founded on the Old Testament!~~***

We find nothing in the New Testament which was not predicted in the Old. Hence our blessed Lord and his Apostles continually refer to the Jewish Scriptures in confirmation of their own word. And it is worthy of particular remark, that we never so much as once hear of their enemies controverting or objecting to the construction which they put upon the Scriptures. The true import of the prophecies was, in many respects, better understood then than now; because the Jews, in order to justify their rejection of Jesus as their Messiah, have labored to find out other interpretations of the Scriptures, different from those which their own forefathers acknowledged and approved. I cannot but regard the very circumstance of the Apostles citing the different prophecies in the way they did, as a strong presumption that the Scriptures were understood at that time in the very sense in which they cited them: for, had they not been so understood by the Jews of that day, the citation of them would have been nugatory. Yes, worse than nugatory; it would have been absurd in the highest degree; and would have produced the directly opposite effect to that which it was intended to produce. Let anyone with this impression upon his mind, read the chapter from whence our text is taken, and he cannot for one moment doubt the divinity of Christ, or the truth of his Messiahship.

***~~2. How safely we may commit ourselves into the Savior's hands!~~***

Were our King a man only, what confidence could we have in his protection? He could not be everywhere: he could not hear and aid all persons at the same moment: consequently we might be overwhelmed before he could come to our aid. But our King is "the Mighty God," who has all things in Heaven, and earth, and Hell under his control; and who has engaged that all his enemies, and ours, shall be put under his feet. Let none then be discouraged because of the number, power, or inveteracy of their enemies: for, if he is for us, none can successfully be against us. Let the consideration therefore which quieted David's mind in all his troubles, compose and quiet our minds also under every trial that can befall us: "the floods have lifted, O Lord, the floods have lifted up their voice: the floods lift up their waves. The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, yes, than the mighty waves of the sea! [Psalm 93:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 93.3-4);" "The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord's throne is in Heaven! [Psalm 11:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 11.3-4)."

***~~3. How obedient we should be to his holy will!~~***

Were it only that we are the work of his hands, we ought to be altogether obedient to his will: but how much more, when, in addition to being our *Creator*, he has become our *Redeemer*; and has assumed our nature, in order that we, through his vicarious sufferings, may be made partakers of his kingdom and glory!

We must not forget that the throne on which he sits is a mediatorial throne; and the kingdom which he governs is a mediatorial kingdom: and that he exercises his dominion not merely *over*us, but *for*us. How happy would the fallen angels be, if they could have one more offer of being received into his kingdom! But this privilege belongs to us only; and to us no longer than during the present short period of our existence upon earth. If we cast not down the weapons of our rebellion now, the day of grace will be past, and we shall hear him say, "Bring hither those that were my enemies, who would not that I would reign over them, and slay them before me."

But methinks we should be constrained by love, rather than by fear. Think, my brethren: what it has cost him to establish his kingdom: what conflicts he has endured for us, that we might be made partakers of his triumphs! It was "through his own death that he triumphed over him who had the power of death, and delivered us from his cruel bondage." Give up yourselves to him: and though death would await you for your fidelity to him, fear it not, but rejoice that you are counted worthy to suffer it for his sake. And know assuredly, that, "if you suffer with him, you shall reign with him," and to all eternity "be glorified together" with him!

***~~#2271~~***

***~~CHRIST'S SUPERIORITY TO ANGELS~~***

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

He also says: "In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end."

THE Old Testament speaks much of Christ: the Psalms in particular, abound with expressions relating to him: and, previous to his coming, the learned Jews, who looked forward to the advent of their Messiah, and longed for his appearance, interpreted them in their true and proper sense. This is clear; because we never find, in any one instance, that the construction put upon these passages by the Apostles of our Lord was controverted, or the application of them to him doubted.

The Jews of later ages, in order to weaken the force of these passages as proving the Messiahship of the Lord Jesus, have invented other explanations of them; determining to put any sense whatever upon their own Scriptures, rather than admit the validity of his claims.

But it is not to be conceived that the Apostle Paul, at the very time that he withheld the signature of his name from this epistle, (lest, by the mention of it, he would excite the prejudices of his countrymen to whom he wrote,) should, in the very outset of his epistle, cite passages in a sense which none of his opponents were ready to admit; and that he would go on to build the whole weight of his arguments on passages so adduced, and so interpreted. Yet we find, that he has applied to Jesus many expressions, which, if his construction of them is true, prove, beyond a doubt, not only the Messiahship of Jesus, but the infinite superiority of his dispensation to that which had been established among the Jews. The Jews gloried in the Mosaic dispensation, as having been given to them, not only by the hands of Moses, but through the instrumentality of angels, [Hebrews 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.3). [Acts 7:53](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.53). [Galatians 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.19).

Paul shows them, in the beginning of this epistle, that, however much they might glory in this honor, the Christian had far higher reason to glory; because his religion was revealed by Christ himself, who, both in his nature as God, and in his office as the appointed Mediator between God and man, was infinitely above the angels.

In confirmation of the Apostle's statement, I shall set before you,

***~~I. The majesty of Him by whom the Gospel was revealed—~~***

Great and glorious things are spoken of him in the preceding context. But we shall wave all mention of those things, and confine our attention to the passage before us, and notice:

***~~1. The passage cited by the Apostle—~~***

The words in my text will be found towards the close of the 102nd Psalm. In that psalm, the writer, impersonating the Church, speaks of the afflictions under which he groaned, [Psalm 102:1-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 102.1-11), and of the consolations which he derived from contemplating the future glories of the Messiah's kingdom, which would extend over the whole world, and endure for evermore, [Psalm 102:12-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 102.12-28). He speaks of "the heathen fearing the name of the Lord, and all the kings of the earth beholding his glory: and of a people who would be created to praise the Lord" verse 15, 18, 22.

The person of whom he speaks, he calls "his God:" "I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my years:" and then he immediately adds, "Of old have you laid the foundations of the earth," and so on. Now, no one ever doubted but the Person whom the Psalmist there addresses, was the God of Heaven and earth: and the Jews themselves were accustomed to interpret the psalm as referring to the Messiah. Paul confirms that interpretation, by expressly applying the text to the Lord Jesus Christ. As for saying that he applied the passage to Christ in a subordinate sense, there is no intimation given of any such thing: nor would the passage have been at all to his purpose, if it were not understood in its full sense: for the Apostle's object was, to establish the superiority of Christ above all the angels of Heaven: and to have asserted that the Father was superior to them, would have been of no use. It is clear, then, that the Lord Jesus Christ is the true God, even "God over all, blessed for ever."

***~~2. The sublime truths contained in it—~~***

The Person here addressed has two attributes ascribed to him; namely, *omnipotence*, as the Creator of the universe; and *immutability*, as being ever the same: and both of these belong to the Lord Jesus Christ; for it was He who created all things, both in Heaven and earth. If an idea be suggested, that he might have merely been an agent deputed to this work, as any angel might have been; and that the execution of it is not sufficient to prove his Godhead; I answer, that though I will not undertake to say what works God might devolve on a creature, there can be no doubt but that he was God who made the worlds: for it is said, "In the beginning was the Word; and the Word was with God; and the Word was God: the same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made, [John 1:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.1-3)." And this was no other than the Lord Jesus Christ: for the same Apostle adds, "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us [John 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.14)."

To the same Person, also, is immutability ascribed: as it is said, "They (the works of creation) will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end."

Now this, also, is an incommunicable attribute of the Deity! "I, the Lord, change not." To no creature whatever can this perfection be assigned: the highest archangel, if left to himself, would fail, even as myriads of once holy angels did in Heaven; from whence they were expelled for their transgression, and were doomed to an eternity of misery in Hell. But to Jesus it essentially belongs; because, though a man, as to his human nature, he is "Jehovah's Fellow," "God manifest in the flesh," "Emmanuel, God with us."

The whole scope of the Apostle's argument leads me, from speaking of the Majesty of Christ, to show, in the next place:

***~~II. The excellency of the Gospel as revealed by him—~~***

Why, when the Law was committed to us by the ministry of angels, would the Gospel be spoken to us by God himself? Is there anything in the Gospel that calls for such a distinction? I answer, There is an immense disparity between the two, even such as may well account for the high honor conferred upon the Gospel. Consider what the Gospel is, consider:

***~~1. The depth of the Gospel's mysteries—~~***

The law was not without its mysteries: but they were all veiled from human sight; in token of which, Moses put a veil upon his face. But "in and through the Lord Jesus Christ, that veil is taken away," and we behold his glory with unveiled face, [2 Corinthians 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.14); [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.18). We are led even to the council-chamber of the Most High, where the Father and the Son concerted together for the recovery of mankind, even ages before they fell. We hear the Son undertaking to become a man, in order that he might suffer in the stead of his offending creatures, and expiate their guilt by his own obedience unto death. We see this very Savior become incarnate. We behold him sojourning on earth, as the accredited Ambassador of Heaven. We hear his voice; we trace his footsteps; we witness all his sufferings unto death. We see him yet again, raised from the dead, and ascending up to Heaven; and sending down the Holy Spirit, to testify of him, and to establish his kingdom upon earth. We behold his kingdom actually established, and maintaining its pre-eminence on earth, despite of all possible opposition from men and devils. And, finally, *we behold in this stupendous mystery every perfection of the Deity, shining in harmonious and united splendor*.

Here then was a mystery, which deserved to be marked with all the honor conferred upon it. True, "this treasure" might well, at a subsequent period, be put "into earthen vessels:" but at its first exhibition it was well that it would be displayed by our incarnate God, and that the word which unfolded it would "at first begin to be spoken by the Lord himself, [Hebrews 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.3)."

***~~2. The richness of the Gospel's provisions—~~***

In this is contained all that man can need, and all that God himself can bestow. We were fallen, even our whole race, like the apostate angels themselves: and being partakers with them in transgression, we were doomed to partake with them also in their punishment. We were sunk even to the very precincts of Hell: yet, behold, from thence are we taken, to be restored to the favor of our God, and to inherit a throne of glory. Could we conceive of the fallen angels, as taken from their sad abodes of misery, and restored to the felicity from which they fell, we might have some idea of the blessings imparted to us by the Gospel of Christ. But who can declare all that is comprehended in pardon, and peace, and holiness, and glory? Eternity itself will not be sufficient to compute and estimate the mighty sum!

***~~3. The duration of the Gospel's benefits—~~***

Eternity! Amazing thought! Eternity! Yes, eternity shall be the duration of blessedness to every believing soul. The benefits of the Mosaic dispensation soon passed away: but not so those which we inherit by the Gospel. As long as the believing soul shall retain its capacity for enjoyment, and the Savior himself exist upon his throne—so long shall He who bought us with his blood, dispense to us all the blessings that he has purchased for us: and the inheritance that shall be granted to us, shall be "incorruptible, and undefiled, and one that fades not away."

***~~Observe, then, from this subject,~~***

***~~1. How worthy of acceptance is the Gospel of Christ!~~***

When we consider who it is that has proclaimed the Gospel to us, even "the true and faithful Witness," the Lord Jesus Christ, we cannot entertain a doubt either of its truth or excellency. Take all the promises and invitations; take them in all their freeness, and in all their fullness; which of them is not worthy to be embraced with our whole hearts, and to be relied upon with our whole souls? Well did Paul say of the Gospel, "It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance." O that we could receive it as we ought! O that we felt our need of it, and that we were duly mindful of the authority and veracity of Him who has revealed it to us! We would not then dare to slight it; nor would we hesitate to rest in it with most implicit confidence.

***~~2. How worthless are all earthly things, in comparison with it!~~***

Let crowns and kingdoms be put into the balance against it, and they will all be found lighter than vanity itself. What is become of all that the greatest monarchs ever enjoyed? It is vanished away as a dream. And what will soon become of the whole world? It will all pass away, as a morning cloud; and be as though it had never been. Of this we are all sensible; but yet we find it difficult to realize our own principles. In opposition to our better judgment, we are carried away after some worthless objects, which often elude our grasp; or, if enjoyed, are no sooner possessed than they perish. But if we seek for Jesus and his kingdom, all will be secured to us. No one ever sought eternal things in earnest, and was disappointed of his hope. No one ever suffered loss for them, but he found it to be gain in the end. To all then, I say, "Labor not for the food that perishes, but for that food which endures unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man shall give unto you; for him has God the Father sealed."

***~~#2272~~***

***~~THE MINISTRY OF ANGELS~~***

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

"Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?"

THE superiority of Christ to angels occupies the mind of the Apostle throughout this chapter. He has illustrated it already in a very convincing way. He has adduced many passages of Holy Writ which confessedly belong to the Messiah; and has shown that they never have been, nor can be, applied to angels, because the things predicated in them, exclusively belong to Jesus. The representations given of the angels necessarily imply a great inferiority to Jesus: for they are commanded to worship him, verse 6, as their Creator; verse 10-12, and their God, verse 8. Nor is it him only whom angels serve: they are the servants of his people also, appointed by him to that very office, and executing it for his honor and glory. This the Apostle mentions as an indisputable fact; and appeals to the Hebrews themselves respecting it: "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?"

The ministry of angels is not only a curious subject as it relates to them, but a very interesting subject as it relates to us; since we, if we are heirs of salvation, are the very persons for whom they minister. We propose therefore to consider the ministry of angels,

***~~I. As evinced in their services for God's people of old—~~***

Angels are called by the Apostle "ministering spirits," which designates at once both their nature and office. In their nature they are not corporeal, but spiritual beings: and they possess both wisdom and strength far beyond any of the sons of men, [2 Samuel 14:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 14.20). [2 Peter 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.11). Their number was once far greater than it at present is; for vast multitudes of them "kept not their first estate, but left their first habitation, and are reserved in chains of darkness to the judgment of the great day, Jude verse 6." Those who have held fast their integrity are called "the elect angels;" and of them there are myriads, yes millions without number, [Psalm 68:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 68.17). [Revelation 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.11). [Hebrews 12:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.22). Among them are different ranks and orders, (as there are also among the fallen angels,) under Michael their head, who is therefore called "the archangel," while they are called "his angels, Jude verse 9. [Revelation 12:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 12.7)."

On God they wait, as his servants, with the utmost alacrity and zeal, [Psalm 103:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 103.20-21); and by him they are employed in executing his holy will.

They were employed by him at the promulgation of his *law*, [Acts 7:53](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.53). [Deuteronomy 33:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 33.2); and they have been rendered useful also in the diffusion of his *Gospel*, [Revelation 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 14.6).

By him they have been sent forth both as executioners of his vengeanceand as dispensers of his mercies. By one angel, he slew in one hour the whole Egyptian first-born both of men and beasts, [Exodus 12:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 12.23). By the agency of one of those powerful spirits was the pestilence produced, to which, for the punishment of David's sin, seventy thousand Israelites fell victims, [2 Samuel 24:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 24.16-17). It was by a sword wielded by a similar messenger from God, that one hundred and eighty-five thousand of the Assyrian host also were slain in one night, [Isaiah 37:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 37.36). Nor is it in such extensive ravages only that they have been employed: a single individual, whom God has ordained to punish for his iniquity, has been the object of a similar commission, and been made to feel the weight of an angel's avenging arm: an angel smote *Herod*for his pride, and he was eaten by worms, [Acts 12:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 12.23).

In like manner they have been frequently made God's ministers for good. In the instances already mentioned they proved signal benefactors, no less than avengers: for, if they smote the enemies of God, they effected thereby a great deliverance for Israel: and if they corrected his people, it was with a view to humble them, and to bring them to repentance. But they have been no less willing to minister to individuals than to a whole nation: nor have they accounted any office beneath their attention.

Was *Abraham's steward*sent to seek a wife for Isaac? An angel went before him to prepare his way, [Genesis 24:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 24.7).

Did *Hagar*flee from the face of her mistress? An angel advised her to return [Genesis 16:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 16.7-9). And when she was put away by Abraham, and her child was perishing with thirst, an angel directed her to a well, where she might find an immediate supply, [Genesis 21:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 21.17).

Were *Lot*and his family in danger of perishing in Sodom? With what affectionate solicitude did angels go to bring them forth, from that devoted place, [Genesis 19:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 19.1); [Genesis 19:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 19.11); [Genesis 19:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 19.15-17).

Does *Balaam*hasten to curse Israel? An angel obstructs his way, and does not allow him to proceed, until he engages to utter nothing but what the Lord shall put into his mouth, [Numbers 22:22-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 22.22-35).

Does the highly-favored *Daniel*pour out his soul before God in prayer? An angel flies from the highest heavens to give him assured intelligence of the acceptance of his prayers, [Daniel 9:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 9.21-23).

Under the New Testament dispensation also, we find them alike attentive to the welfare of God's people.

Is the *child Jesus*in danger of being involved in the common ruin of the infants whom Herod slew? An angel appears to Joseph, and directs him to flee to Egypt with his wife and child, [Matthew 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 2.13).

Is *Peter*kept in prison to be brought forth the very next day for execution? An angel opens for him the prison doors, and liberates him from his confinement, [Acts 12:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 12.7).

Is *Paul*ready to be overwhelmed in the waves of the tempestuous ocean? An angel comes to assure him, that both he, and for his sake all the ship's company also, shall be saved, [Acts 27:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 27.23).

We might adduce a great many other instances of their friendly interposition for the people of God: but sufficient has been spoken to show, that the office of ministering to the saints has not been assigned to them on one or two occasions only of extraordinary magnitude, but that it has been in every successive age their uniform and willing employment.

By the view we have taken of the ministry of angels in former times, we shall be prepared to contemplate it,

***~~II. As still exercised towards the heirs of salvation—~~***

The vision of Jacob's ladder, with the angels ascending and descending upon it, is still realized throughout the world, even as our blessed Lord has taught us to expect it would be, [Genesis 28:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 28.12). [John 1:51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.51). As soon as we embrace the Gospel, we are brought into actual communion with them, even with that "innumerable company of them" that are before the throne of God, [Hebrews 12:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.22). But, as omnipresence is the prerogative of God alone, there are some who have a special charge of particular saints, and whose office it is to watch over them in a more especial manner, [Matthew 18:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.10) and [Acts 12:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 12.15).

They have still, as formerly, a great concern for the Gospel, desiring to get a deeper insight into it themselves, [1 Peter 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.12), and longing for a diffusion of it throughout the world. As the first promulgation of it was to them an occasion of joy and triumph, insomuch that they left their bright abodes in Heaven, and came down, a whole multitude of them, to earth on purpose to proclaim it, [Luke 2:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.13-14); so the acceptance of it by any single individual is to them a source of unutterable joy. Not even the glory of the Divine presence so attracts their notice, but they can with pleasure turn away their eyes to behold a mourning penitent. Nor is their felicity in God himself so perfect, but it receives an addition from this blissful sight, [Luke 15:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 15.10). From the moment that anyone receives the Gospel aright, they become his servants, and wait upon him with unwearied assiduity. "They encamp around him" when he is stationary, [Psalm 34:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.7), and go out with him wherever he goes, in order to "hold him up in their hands, lest he dash his foot against a stone, [Psalm 91:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 91.11-12)."

Nor is it about his corporeal welfare only that they are concerned: they are attentive also to the concerns of his soul, and oftentimes support him in his conflicts, even as they did his Lord and Master, who, we are expressly told, had "an angel sent from Heaven to strengthen him" when agonizing in the garden, [Luke 22:43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.43). What was then accomplished in the Head, is doubtless yet daily wrought in the members also: for as "He was tempted in all things like as we are," so shall we be succored in all things like as he was, [John 6:57](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.57).

In a dying hour, more especially, they redouble their attentions; and wait with tender solicitude the departure of the spirit, that they may bear it on their wings to Heaven into the very presence of their God. Nor do they render this service only to men of higher rank and quality: they minister with equal pleasure to the least and basest of mankind: if there is a Lazarus so poor as to exist only on the crumbs that fall from a rich man's table, and so destitute of friends that the very dogs surround him to lick his sores [Luke 16:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.21-22), they will perform the same office for him as freely as for the greatest monarch upon earth.

Beyond this life too will they afford us their kind services: for, when our bodies, after having moldered into dust, shall again be raised in the last day, these benevolent agents will employ themselves in gathering together the dispersed saints from every quarter of the globe, and in bearing them into the presence of their Lord and Savior, [Matthew 24:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.30-31).

The separation of the tares from the wheat will be effected by them: and, while the tares are bound up by them in bundles, and cast into the fire that never shall be quenched, the wheat shall be gathered by them, and carried into the granary of Heaven! [Matthew 13:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.30). O fearful thought to the ungodly, to find those benevolent spirits the instruments of their destruction, when they might, but for their own fault, have secured them as agents for their welfare! But to the saints how joyful the contemplation, that those elder brethren who never fell, will so exult in, and contribute to, the recovery of our apostate race!

Their services will now be ended, because we shall then no longer have any occasion for their aid. But the expressions of their love will never end: for, having seen with joy our fruition of redeeming love, they will unite with us in songs of praise to our redeeming God for ever and ever! [Revelation 5:9-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.9-13).

***~~Improvement—~~***

***~~1. How desirable is it to be found among "the heirs of salvation!"~~***

To be heirs of great estates we all account desirable; but to be "heirs of salvation," how few of us regard as an object worthy of any serious attention! The very character of an heir of salvation, so far from being estimable in the eyes of the generality, is despised; and the names by which such a person is designated in Scripture, are made terms of reproach. "The elect," "the saints," "the godly," are names in the estimation of the world, equivalent to hypocrites and fanatics. Such, however, is not the opinion of the holy angels. When once we are brought into that family of which Christ is the head, they love us, they honor us, they serve us; yes, they account it their highest honor to minister unto us. Let me then exhort all of you, my brethren, to defer to the judgment of those who must confessedly be so much better judges than yourselves: for it is not the angels only who thus express their opinions, but God also, who assigns to them this very office, and sends them forth for the execution of it. And,*if men treat us with contempt because we prefer an invisible and eternal inheritance before one that is visible and temporal*, "let us not be ashamed, but let us glorify God on this behalf, [1 Peter 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.16)."

Does any one ask: How shall I become an heir of salvation? I answer, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ," and "cleave unto him with full purpose of heart;" for then shall you be children of the living God! [John 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.12). [Galatians 4:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.26); [Galatians 4:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.29); and, "if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ [Romans 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.17);" who, if he is "the Savior of all men, is especially the Savior of those who believe, [1 Timothy 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 4.10)."

***~~2. How awful will it be to be found among the opposers of God's people!~~***

Little did the persecuting Saul think whom he opposed, when he labored to destroy the followers of Christ. He imagined that his efforts were directed only against a number of wild enthusiasts: but, when he heard the Lord Jesus Christ himself expostulating with him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" he saw his error, and learned, that "whoever touches God's people, touches the apple of his eye [Zechariah 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 2.8)." Nor are the angels indifferent about the treatment which is shown to the objects of their care. Of this we are assured expressly by our Lord himself: and we desire your particular attention to this point.

Our Lord, in order to inculcate the great doctrine of humility, exhorted his disciples to imitate a little child, which, for the more effectually impressing of the lesson upon their minds, he had set in the midst of them. He then declared, that whoever would offend one of the little ones who believed in him, it would be better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. And the reason which he assigns is very remarkable: "Take heed that you despise not one of these little ones: for I say unto you, that in Heaven *their angels*do always behold the face of my Father who is in Heaven, [Matthew 18:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.6); [Matthew 18:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.10)."

What is the meaning of this? and what is the force of this menace? The foregoing subject will explain it. The meaning is this. The least and basest of God's people have one or more angels peculiarly interested about them in Heaven: and, when they see the injuries done to the objects of their care, they cry to God in their behalf for vengeance, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, do you not judge and avenge their cause? [Revelation 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 6.10)." And then, as "they do continually his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word," they wait for the first intimation of the Divine will, and are ready to execute without delay, the judgment which God assigns: and, if there were a hundred and eighty-five thousand of those enemies, they would all be "eaten up with worms," as Herod was, or be cut off, like the Assyrian host, in one single night.

Let us mark particularly the extent of this admonition. It is not said, Take heed that you do not destroy my people; but, that you do not "despise" them; that you despise not "one" of them; not one of "these little ones who believe," however mean and despicable he may appear; for he has an avenger in Heaven: and the vengeance he will inflict is far more terrible than being drowned in the depths of the sea; for into the depths of Hell shall he cast your soul, the very instant he has inflicted the fatal stroke upon your body.

Ah! brethren, will you not tremble at this threat? Will you still account it a light matter either outwardly to deride, or inwardly to despise, a child of God? Beware, I beg you, of your impending danger: and, if you will not seek to become heirs of salvation yourselves, at your peril do not lift up your finger against one that is. If this be man's threatening, disregard it; but, if it is God's threatening, know that you cannot hope for success in fighting against God.

***~~3. How excellent a work is that of ministering to the saints!~~***

It has been shown that this is an office which even the angels themselves desire. And that they do perform it, is not merely asserted in our text, but assumed as a fact that is undoubted and unquestionable: "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?" Is there so much as one among them all who accounts himself too high to wait upon the least and lowest of the human race? If then such be their employment, see what an honorable office those among ourselves sustain who are laboring in any way for the good of souls! They are fellow-workers with angels, yes, and fellow-workers with God also! Engage then in this good work, all of you, according to your ability; knowing that, "if you are to do good unto all men, you are especially to do it unto those who are of the household of faith, [Galatians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.10)." The more you resemble the angels here, the more richly shall you participate in their felicity in the eternal world!

***~~#2273~~***

***~~GREATNESS OF THE GOSPEL SALVATION~~***

***~~[Hebrews 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.3)~~***

"How shall we escape, if we neglect such a great salvation?"

TO estimate our privileges aright, we would compare them, not with those of the heathen world, but with those enjoyed by God's ancient people the Jews. These were favored with a revelation from Heaven, and with ordinances of divine appointment, whereby they were to obtain acceptance with God. But their dispensation was burdensome beyond measure; their laws were executed with a rigor that was extreme; insomuch, that a man was stoned to death for only gathering a few sticks upon the Sabbath-day, [Numbers 15:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 15.32). In fact, any presumptuous violation of the law, attested by two or three witnesses, brought with it the punishment of death, [Numbers 15:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 15.30).

Now, when it is considered how very different a dispensation we live under, it may well be asked, "How shall we escape, if we neglect such a great salvation?" For surely, if a dispensation introduced by angels only required such strict attention, and was so inexorably enforced, much more must the Gospel dispensation, introduced as it has been by God's only dear Son, and attested by the Holy Spirit, demand attention and observance from all to whom it is revealed.

The words which I have read, will lead me to show you,

***~~I. The greatness of the Gospel dispensation—~~***

***~~To learn what the Gospel salvation is, we are referred to the preaching of our blessed Lord and his Apostles—~~***

Our blessed Lord did not systematically lay down the whole nature of the Gospel salvation; but he opened it with a sufficient clearness, that those who paid due attention to his word might easily comprehend it. What, for instance, could be plainer than the instruction given to Nicodemus, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life! [John 3:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.14-15)." Here the perishing condition of the whole world is declared, along with the means of their deliverance; namely, through the death of Christ as an atonement for sin, and by the simple exercise of faith in him. See also, verse 16, 18, 36. The same truth was repeatedly declared to others [John 6:51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.51); [John 11:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.25-26); [John 12:32-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.32-33) and [Matthew 26:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.2),[7-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matthew 26.7-28); and it was fully announced, that, as he completed in himself the whole of the Mosaic ritual, he was the only medium of access to God, the only Savior of the world, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes unto the Father but by me, [John 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.6)."

His Apostles after him preached the very same doctrine; and to it, as preached by them, the Holy Spirit set his seal. When *Peter*opened the Gospel to the Jews, he bade them believe in Jesus Christ for the remission of their sins; and in like manner when he opened it to the Gentiles: and on each occasion the Holy Spirit bore witness to it, by a visible descent from Heaven, [Acts 2:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.38-39); [Acts 10:43-44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.43-44). Just so, *Paul*also preached, and with the same effect, to the people at Antioch, and to the Jailor at Philippi, [Acts 13:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.38-39); [Acts 16:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.30-31). In a word, this was the Gospel which they all preached; and by this they prevailed to establish the kingdom of Christ throughout the greater part of the known world, [Mark 16:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 16.15-16).

***~~But how shall I declare the greatness of this salvation?~~***

Consider it as *imparted*to us; who shall estimate the blessings of it? Take it either separately or collectively; and tell me if you, or an angel from Heaven, can ever calculate the value of pardon, and peace, and holiness, and glory? Eternity would be too short to count the mighty sum.

But consider it as *purchased*for us; there all efforts to estimate it aright are altogether vain. What shall I say of the incarnation of God's only dear Son, and of his substitution in the place of sinners? What shall I say of his obedience unto death: and of his working out a righteousness, wherein every sinner in the universe, if only he believed in Jesus, might stand accepted before God? It is evident that the theme is too vast either for men or angels; and that "the height, and depth, and length, and breadth of this love can never be fully comprehended," or adequately explored, [Ephesians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.18-19).

Well, then, may we now be prepared to hear of,

***~~II. The danger of neglecting it—~~***

Here an appeal is made to every living man; and sinners are made judges in their own cause. Only consider what is included in a neglect of the Gospel salvation:

***~~1. What ingratitude!~~***

Did Almighty God so compassionate our fallen state as to give his only-begotten Son to stand in our place and stead, and by his own obedience unto death to rescue us from all the miseries we have deserved? What shall be said of those on whom this stupendous act of grace makes no impression? If but a man, a fellow-sinner, had substituted himself in our place, and died for us by the hands of a public executioner, what would be thought of us if we felt no obligation to him?

I put it then to you: What must God think of us, if we feel no desire to requite his unmerited and unbounded kindness to us, in giving his only dear Son to die for us? I appeal to all: May we not well expect to lose this salvation, if we are so indifferent about it, as to treat both it, and the means used to effect it, with neglect? I cannot doubt what is the testimony which the conscience of every one before me is constrained to give.

***~~2. What unreasonableness!~~***

Whoever thinks of attaining the means without the end? You cannot obtain anything in this life without some effort suited to the occasion. How can you hope, therefore, that Heaven, and all its glory, shall ever be attained without some effort? If I had to require all the exertions that poor heathen devotees employ to secure the favor of their gods, it were highly reasonable that you would engage day and night in all the most self-denying services that could be prescribed. But when I have only to say, "Believe in Christ, and be saved," your neglect is unreasonable in the highest degree.

Suppose, when Moses erected the brazen serpent that all who looked to it might be healed, any had been so perverse as to say, 'No, I will not turn my head to look to it!' Would you not say that such a one justly merited the death that must have ensued? Such then is the desert of you who neglect the Savior: and I will leave you to judge, whether your unreasonable obstinacy, in refusing to comply with such easy means, does not justly cut you off from all hope of that salvation which he offers to you?

***~~3. What horrible impiety!~~***

I am afraid of putting this in its true point of view, lest you would think that I wish to aggravate your guilt beyond all due bounds. But the Apostle himself represents it as "a trampling under foot the Son of God, and putting him to an open shame, and doing despite unto the Spirit of grace."

Now, suppose you could see this matter as God sees it. Suppose you could see the Lord Jesus Christ coming in person to a man, and that man turning upon him and trampling him under his feet! Then suppose you saw the Holy Spirit also importuning and entreating him to accept of mercy, and the man turning his back upon him, and doing all manner of despite to him: would you think that man had any just ground to expect a salvation which he treated with such contempt?

This, then, is the very light in which God places it, and in which you also ought to view it, [Hebrews 10:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.28-29). You, in fact, say to God, 'It was needless to send your Son for me. I did not want him; nor will I receive him: and if I am not to be saved but by him, I am determined to abide by the alternative: for I will rather perish in my sins, than be at the trouble of seeking salvation through him.'

I think I need not put it to you, whether the damnation of such an obstinate sinner be just or not! I feel persuaded that the appeal made to you in my text has made its way to all your hearts; and that you see how vain it must be for any to hope to escape the displeasure of God, if they continue to treat with such neglect and contempt, the wonderful salvation provided for them.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who have neglected this salvation—~~***

I wish it to be particularly remembered, that while I address you, I do not lay to your charge any sin except that which is expressly specified in my text. I will grant, that, as far as any flagrant act of sin, you have been as innocent as you yourselves can affirm. But have you therefore committed no damning sin? Ask yourselves whether you have not neglected the Gospel salvation. Ask whether, if any man had thought as little of his earthly business as you have thought of that, and had entered into his temporal concerns with as little ardor as you have into the concerns of your soul—he could reasonably have hoped for success? Yes, tell me, whether you yourselves would not have been ready to ascribe his failure to his neglect of business? You would not consider an occasional thought about his concerns sufficient, while yet he paid no just attention to them: and so, if you now and then, in a formal way, perform what you call your religious duties, while the concerns of eternity do not really occupy your souls, you must not imagine that you are free from the charge which my text imputes to you.

Consider, I beg you, what salvation is; and how greatly you need it; and how it is to be sought; and what an entire devotion of soul is required in order to a due performance of that duty. Tell me: Have you, with deep contrition of heart, mourned and lamented your sins? Have you cried to the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy, as if you felt really your perishing condition? Have you utterly renounced all hope in yourselves, and cast yourselves altogether upon him as your only hope? And is this still, at this very time, the daily habit of your mind? Nothing less than this is what the Gospel requires of you; nor without this can you ever enjoy the salvation which it has provided for you. I beg you, consider this well: and provide, if you can, an answer to the appeal, the solemn appeal, which God himself here makes to you.

***~~2. Those who are really seeking after salvation—~~***

If you are seeking salvation altogether in and through Christ, then will I alter the words of my text, and ask, How shall you not escape, if you are seeking this great salvation? Be assured of this: the salvation is great enough to answer all your wants, and to satisfy all your desires. *There is in Christ an inexhaustible fullness of all that you stand in need of; and out of that fullness you shall receive to the utmost extent of your necessities*. If a doubt or fear arises in your minds, know that none ever perished looking unto Jesus. "To those who are in him, there never was, nor ever shall be, any condemnation! [Romans 8:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.1)."

Every promise in the Bible secures to you the possession of that salvation. *Are you blind, and guilty, and polluted, and enslaved? Behold, wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and complete redemption, are given to you in Christ Jesus, and shall be imparted in the measure that your necessities require.*Enjoy then your liberty; and let the salvation thus accorded to you fill you with unutterable joy. I grant that *your enemies are mighty, and your corruptions great, and your temptations manifold*—but still I boldly adopt the appeal in my text, and ask, How shall you not escape, if you seek this salvation? Look at others, and see how they have escaped. See in those who crucified the Lord of glory, how speedy and effectual was the change wrought on them. See what has been already done for that multitude whom no man can number, and who are already enjoying that salvation around the throne of God. Soon shall you be of that happy number. Only let the Gospel salvation be sought by you as the one thing needful, and you shall never feel the lack of it in time or eternity. Give yourselves thoroughly to the attainment of it; and "your labor shall not be in vain in the Lord."

***~~#2274~~***

***~~CHRIST'S SUPERIORITY TO ANGELS~~***

***~~[Hebrews 2:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.6-8)~~***

"But there is a place where someone has testified: What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor and put everything under his feet." In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him."

OUR blessed Lord has said, "Search the Scriptures; for they testify of me." Hence it appears, that the Jews were highly privileged; because, if they would only look up to God for the illumination of their minds, they had within their reach an infallible directory for their way to Heaven. But we are still more highly privileged, in that we have a multitude of passages pointed out to us by men, who were themselves inspired of God to discern and to explain the meaning of them. If we had been left to ourselves, we might have doubted whether our interpretations of the Scripture were just: but, when holy men of God are moved by the Holy Spirit, to open and apply those very words to Christ, which the prophets, under the influence of the same Spirit, spoke of him, we proceed without any fear of error or delusion.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, the types and prophecies of the Old Testament are more fully opened to us, than in any other part of the apostolic writings. That epistle was evidently written on purpose to point out the connection between the Jewish and Christian dispensations; to show their perfect correspondence with each other, and the completion of Judaism in Christianity. It would be profitable to trace this through the whole epistle: but we must content ourselves with noticing only the passage before us.

Let us then consider,

***~~I. The testimony here adduced—~~***

The manner in which the Apostle speaks of this passage of Holy Writ is somewhat remarkable: at first it appears as if he himself did not recollect the author, or the part of Scripture where the passage occurred; but the fact is, that the Jews were so conversant with their Scriptures, as not to need anything more than the mere citation of the words: the writer of them, and the place, were sufficiently known to all. What its import is, we can be at no loss to determine.

David, contemplating the starry heavens, and the perfections of God as displayed in them, breaks out into a devout acknowledgment of the condescension of God, in noticing so poor and abject a creature as man; and his goodness in having subjected to man the whole animal creation, [Psalm 8:3-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 8.3-8). This is the primary meaning of the text: and, if we had not been instructed by God himself to look for anything further, we would have rested in that as its full and only import.

But we know on infallible authority, that there was a prophetic meaning in the psalm; and that it referred to the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. Having this clue given to us, we find, that the mystical sense of the passage is, if we may so speak, by far the most literal. The words, in fact, are inexplicable, as referred to man, whether in his innocent or fallen state: for Adam was not reduced from a higher state in order to be made lower than the angels conveys this idea: nor is man, in his fallen state, "a little lower than they, but a great deal lower. Moreover, fallen man was not "crowned with glory and honor," nor are all the creatures in a state of subjection to him. The very words themselves therefore lead our thoughts to Christ, in whom alone they ever received their accomplishment: and the manner in which the Apostle quotes them, shows that the Jews themselves had interpreted them in that very sense in which he quoted them: for he is arguing with the Jews, to show them the superiority of Christ to *Moses*, their great lawgiver, and to the *angels*, by whose ministry their law was given: and, if he had quoted passages from their writings which did not bear directly on his point, or had put a construction upon them which had not been generally received, they would have denied his interpretation of the passages he adduced: and consequently his whole argument would have immediately fallen to the ground.

If anything further were needed to show that the testimony is here properly adduced, we might observe, that our blessed Lord himself quotes the very words before the text as applicable to himself, and as being generally understood to refer to the Messiah, [Psalm 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.2) with [Matthew 21:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 21.15-16).

Having ascertained the meaning of the testimony, let us consider:

***~~II. The points established by it—~~***

Some interpreters understand the text as quoted only in an accommodated sense: but the words themselves, and the scope of the Apostle's argument, prove that *we must understand it as a prophecy that has been strictly and literally fulfilled*. In this view it contains much respecting the Lord Jesus. It proves:

***~~1. The dignity of his person—~~***

The scope of the Apostle's argument in the two first chapters of this epistle is, to show that Christ is superior to the heavenly hosts, and "has by inheritance a more excellent name than they." Him the Father acknowledges as his only-begotten Son, [Hebrews 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.5); and commands all the angels to adore him, [Hebrews 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.6). Him he addresses as the Creator and Governor of all things, the eternal, immutable Jehovah, [Hebrews 1:8-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.8-12), to whom all adverse powers shall assuredly be subjected, [Hebrews 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.13); to whom also the Christian dispensation ("of which Paul speaks," and which he designated as the "world to come,") is altogether committed, that he may order everything relating to it according to his sovereign will and pleasure, [Hebrews 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.5).

As for angels, he has never spoken such things concerning them, or committed such power to them, [Hebrews 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.5). They are the fellow-servants of the saints, [Revelation 19:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 19.10); [Revelation 22:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 22.9), and appointed to minister unto them in the capacity of servants, [Hebrews 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.14). However venerable therefore they are in themselves, and whatever honor God put upon them in the giving of the law, they are infinitely below the Lord Jesus, who is their Creator, their Governor, and their God. In his human nature he was "made a little lower than they;" but in his pre-existent nature he was infinitely above them. O that we may have worthy conceptions of his Divine Majesty, and ever be ready to address him in the words of Thomas, "My Lord, and my God!"

***~~2. The truth of his Messiahship—~~***

Here is a prophecy that must receive an accomplishment: there must be a person superior to the angels in his own nature, and made lower than them by the assumption of our nature. He must submit to this humiliation "for the purpose of suffering death," as the penalty due to the sins of men. Having "tasted death for every man," he must be raised, and "crowned with glory and honor," and must "have all things in Heaven, earth, and Hell, put under his feet." Now then we ask: In whom has this, or any part of it, been fulfilled? Who has experienced either the humiliation or the exaltation which are here predicted? That Jesus has fulfilled the prophecy, we know, for, "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! 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!

[Philippians 2:6-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.6-11)." Is there any one else of whom these things, or any one of them, can be spoken? Assuredly not: "But we see Jesus" thus humbled, and thus exalted, verse 9; and, consequently, Jesus is, beyond all doubt, "the Christ, the Savior of the world!"

***~~3. The certainty of his triumphs—~~***

When he was on earth "he was crucified through weakness; but now he lives by the power of God." He is not only "crowned with glory and honor," as his followers will be, but is "set far above all principality and power, and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and being constituted Head over all things to the Church, he fills all in all," supplying every member of it with light and life, even as the sun does in the material world, [Ephesians 1:20-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.20-23). The Apostle indeed justly observes, "We see not yet all things put under him, verse 8." But we see enough to assure us, that all things shall in due time be put under him.

See to what a state he himself was reduced, when he lay sealed up, and guarded in the silent tomb! but he rose triumphant, and ascended up to Heaven, and "sits as King upon God's holy hill of Zion."

See how quickly he triumphed over all the lusts and prejudices of mankind, and subdued millions to the obedience of faith; and this through the instrumentality of a few poor fishermen!

See how he carries on his victories yet daily through the world! Indeed every saint is a living witness for him, and a pledge to the world that nothing in the universe shall finally withstand his power.

***~~Surely this subject is full:~~***

***~~1. Of consolation to the godly—~~***

You are weak, and your enemies are mighty—but is this any ground for despondency. If an angel had been set at the head of the Church, you might well be afraid. See [Exodus 32:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 32.34); [Exodus 33:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 33.2-3). But under the care of Jesus you have nothing to fear. Think with yourselves, is not the Lord Jesus possessed of "all power, both in Heaven and earth?" Is there not "a fullness treasured up in him," on purpose that "you may receive out of it, even grace upon grace?" Does not "all the fullness of the Godhead dwell in him bodily?" Has he not said, "My grace is sufficient for you?" Fear not, then; but "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." Adopt the triumphant language which the prophet has put into your mouth; and "say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength!" Fear not, I say; for "through His strength you shall be enabled to do all things," and "be more than conquerors through him who loved you."

***~~2. Of terror to the ungodly—~~***

Because you behold not many signal interpositions of his power, you think that you may rebel against him with impunity. But see whether this prophecy has not been so far fulfilled already, as to give you reason to expect its full accomplishment! God has even "sworn that every knee shall bow to Jesus, [Isaiah 45:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.23) with [Romans 14:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.11)." If you will not submit to the scepter of his grace, he will "break you in pieces with a rod of iron, [Psalm 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.9)." Nor is it a mere *nominal submission*that will suffice—you must put yourselves willingly and unreservedly "under his feet," as conscious of your ill desert, and as ready to justify him, if he would "execute upon you the fierceness of his anger." You must be wholly and altogether his, in every member of your body, and in every faculty of your soul. *O deceive not yourselves by a feigned or partial submission!*But "kiss the Son!" kiss him in token of the ardor of your affection, and of the delight you take in living to his glory.

This is your true "wisdom, even though you are kings and judges of the earth [Psalm 2:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.10-12)." He is that "stone which the builders refused, and which is become the cornerstone." If you build upon him, you will find him "a sure foundation;" but if you reject him, "he will fall upon you, and crush you to powder! [Luke 20:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 20.17-18)."

***~~#2275~~***

***~~SUFFERINGS OF THE MESSIAH NECESSARY~~***

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

"In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering."

THE Jews expected, that, at the coming of their Messiah, "all things would be subjected to him." But what kind of a dominion his would be, or how it would be obtained, they knew not. They pleased themselves with the idea of a triumphing Messiah; but quite overlooked what the prophets had foretold respecting the sufferings by which those triumphs would be accomplished. In a word, they neither knew how great he would be, nor to what a state of degradation he would be reduced. But Paul informed them, that, though he was, in his own nature, superior to angels, he would be brought into a condition inferior to them, for the purpose of expiating our guilt, and redeeming a ruined world. And this he declared to be such a dispensation as befit the Most High God: "In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering"

From these words I shall take occasion to show:

***~~I. The grand peculiarity of the Christian dispensation—~~***

***~~God had determined to bring an innumerable multitude of sons to glory—~~***

He had not dealt so with the fallen angels. Of them, not so much as one had been saved: but of men, it was God's purpose to restore many to the relation which they had forfeited as his "sons:" and to the inheritance of "glory," which they had lost.

***~~This he had ordained to accomplish through the intervention of his dear Son—~~***

Man could not effect it for himself; nor could all the holy angels in Heaven have effected it. But Christ, being God equal with the Father, was appointed to be "the Captain of our salvation," and to obtain for us what could never be wrought by any other means.

***~~It was, however, to be effected solely "through the sufferings" of his Son—~~***

It was not by any exercise of his power that salvation was to be wrought; nor by instructing men how they might save themselves. He must become their Surety and Substitute, and must die in their place and stead. This is the grand peculiarity of the Gospel: and, if we view not the Gospel in this light, as a redemption wrought by blood, even by the blood of God's only dear Son, we have no just conception of it at all.

Not content with a bare assertion, the Apostle states,

***~~II. The special reason for this appointment—~~***

God being the One Author and end of all, ("by whom, and for whom, are all things,") might be expected to accomplish this work by a mere arbitrary appointment of his own. But a very different line of conduct "befit him." If he would save men at all, it was expedient that it would be through the sufferings of his Son. This, I say, befit him:

***~~1. For the honoring of his law—~~***

The law had been violated: and if its sanctions were not enforced, both it and the Lawgiver himself would be dishonored. But that could not be: God would not allow it: and *rather than such a stain would be brought on his moral government, he would exact from his only dear Son, the debt that was due from us; and inflict on him the curse which our sins had merited.*In this way the authority of his law would be fully vindicated, at the time that the transgressors of it were forgiven: yes, by the sufferings of our incarnate God it would be more honored than if all its penalties had been inflicted on the whole human race. Seeing, then, that such honor would accrue to the law from this marvelous device, it "befit" the Almighty Lawgiver to arrange his dispensations with a view to this great result.

***~~2. For the displaying of his own perfections—~~***

If man had been forgiven without any atonement made for sin, what would we have known either of the justice or the holiness of God? Holiness imports a hatred of sin; and justice, the dealing with men according to their deserts. But not a trace of these would have been found, if men had not suffered, either in their own persons or their Surety, the penalty due to sin. Even truth itself would have failed; and God's most solemn threatenings been falsified. But no such consequences flow from the exercise of mercy through a suffering Savior. On the contrary, every perfection of the Deity is the more honored, because, what it derives not from us, it receives from the Lord Jesus Christ, who, as our Surety, endured all that justice, or holiness, or truth could possibly require.

***~~3. For the magnifying of his own grace—~~***

Doubtless it would have been a stupendous act of grace, if man had been forgiven without any atonement made for sin. But, as glorious as such a favor would have been, it would have had no glory, by reason of the infinitely richer display of mercy which we have in the Gospel of his Son. Such a mercy, if I may so speak, would have been attended with no sacrifice on the part of God: but by giving his own Son out of his bosom, he has made a sacrifice which no finite intelligence can ever duly appreciate.

Hence this is represented as exhibiting, above all other things, "the exceeding riches of his grace;" and as commending to us, with unrivaled evidence, the wonders of his love: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and gave his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins, 1 [John 4:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.9-10)." But to display this grace was worthy of the Deity; and though, with a view to it, the sacrifice that he must make was great, yet, on the whole, was it such a sacrifice as well "befit him."

***~~4. For the enabling of his Son to execute every part of his mediatorial office—~~***

There are parts of that office which he could not execute without suffering. As he could not atone for sin without suffering, so neither could he yield obedience to all that the law required of us without suffering. Patience and resignation can only be exercised under suffering: and therefore, "though he was a Son—yet he learned obedience by the things which he suffered [Hebrews 5:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.8-9)." He must also *sympathize*with his afflicted people: and this also he would have been unable to do, if he had not been experimentally acquainted with sufferings in his own person: but "having suffered through temptations, he is now able to support those who are tempted, [Hebrews 2:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.17-18);" and we, knowing that "we have One who can be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, are encouraged to come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help us in the time of need, [Hebrews 4:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.15-16)."

***~~II. Let me now ask, if such a dispensation "befit God," then what befits us?~~***

***~~Does God seek to "bring us, as his sons, to glory?"~~***

***~~Let us seek to obtain this great benefit—~~***

Can it be right that Almighty God would take such an interest in us, and we remain indifferent about our own state? Can we by any possibility be advanced to such honor as "sonship" with God, and such happiness as the possession of his "glory"—and shall we not exert ourselves to the utmost of our power? Shall any earthly distinctions stand for a moment in competition with these?

***~~Has God appointed his own Son to be "the Author of our salvation?"~~***

***~~Let us seek salvation through Him alone—~~***

Through Christ alone it can ever be attained. He is the sole "Author" of it; and from him, as the purchase of his blood, and the effect of his grace, it must be received. Let us not, for a moment, cherish a thought of obtaining salvation from any other source: but let our reliance on him be simple and entire. Let "him be our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, and our complete redemption."

***~~Has God seen fit to "perfect his own Son through sufferings?"~~***

***~~Let us be content to be perfected by him in the same way—~~***

He has "predestined his people to be conformed to the image of his Son, [Romans 8:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.29);" and this conformity must be in *holiness*, in *sufferings*, and in glory. Our blessed Lord has told us, that we must "take up our cross daily, and follow him:" that "the servant cannot expect to be above his Lord:" and that "we must *suffer*with him, if ever we would reign with him, [Romans 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.17)." Let us be content, then, to fill up the measure of sufferings which he has allotted to us; and, if it must be so, "through much tribulation to enter into his kingdom." Let us be content, do I say? Rather, let us "rejoice that we are counted worthy to suffer for his sake," and account it an honor to be "partakers of his sufferings."

The Israelites, under Joshua, did not gain possession of Canaan without encountering a foe: nor can we, under "the Author of our salvation," become victors without a conflict. But let us "war a good warfare," and "endure unto the end." So shall we be not sons only, but heirs also, of our heavenly Father, and be made partakers of his glory for evermore!

***~~#2276~~***

***~~THE ENDS OF CHRIST'S INCARNATION~~***

***~~[Hebrews 2:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.14-15)~~***

"Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil--and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death."

IS it so indeed, that He who was the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person; that He who created and upholds all things by the word of his power; that He whom all the angels in Heaven adore, became a man, and was made in all things like unto us, sin only excepted? Yes, "He, who was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, emptied himself of all his glory, and took upon him the form of a servant:" "the mighty God himself was a child born, and a Son given."

And shall God be manifest in the flesh, and we not inquire into the reasons of such a stupendous mystery? Shall we profess to believe this truth; and yet pay no more attention to it, than if it was a cunningly-devised fable? Let us inquire what occasion there was for it, and what ends God designed to accomplish by it. These are stated in the words before us.

The children, whom he designed to redeem from death and Hell, were in such a state, that nothing short of this would avail for their final happiness: they were subjected to death, and could be delivered from it only by one dying in their stead: they were in bondage to Satan, and could only be rescued from his dominion by one who would overcome this great adversary, in their nature, and in their behalf; in a word, by one who would both suffer what they merited, and gain the victories which they needed.

These are the ends of our Savior's incarnation, as specified in the text.

***~~I. The more immediate end was to suffer—~~***

Suffer he must, even unto death, if he would effect the deliverance of his chosen people.

***~~1. The necessities of his own people required it—~~***

They were reduced by sin to the lowest ebb of misery. Doomed to participate in the lot of the fallen angels, they were as incapable as they of effecting their own deliverance. What then must be done? Must they be left to perish for ever? Or shall an atonement be made for them? But *who*can offer an atonement that shall be of sufficient value to expiate their offenses? The blood of bulls and of goats will not suffice: nor if the highest angel in Heaven could offer himself, would that be adequate to the occasion; seeing that his merits, whatever they might be, could never extend to all the millions of our guilty race. The sacrifice, to answer that end, must be of infinite value: it must be offered by a person of infinite value: it must be offered by a person of infinite dignity: he must be God as well as man. He must be man, that he may suffer; he must be God, that his sufferings may be available for the desired end. Hence the necessity for our blessed Lord to become incarnate; and hence the necessity for him to die. Supposing him to come from Heaven, and to teach us both by precept and example: that would not answer the necessities of man. Divine *justice*must be satisfied for the sins of men: the *holiness*of the Deity must be displayed in the punishment of sin: the *truth*of God, which denounced a curse against every transgression of his law, must be kept inviolate. In a word, a sentence of death was gone forth against sinners; and it must be inflicted either on them—or on a surety in their stead. Hence, if Jesus would ever bring us back to God, "he must suffer, the just in the place of us the unjust, [1 Peter 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.18)." If he would redeem our souls, he must "give his own life a ransom for us."

***~~2. His own covenant engagements required it—~~***

From all eternity did the Son of God engage to repair the evils which it was foreseen would in time be introduced by sin. A council of peace was held between the Father and the Son, [Zechariah 6:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 6.13). The terms which were then agreed upon, are expressly mentioned by the Prophet Isaiah, "When you shall make your soul an offering for sin, you shall see a seed, who shall prolong their days; and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in your hand, [Isaiah 53:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.10)." These terms being acceded to on the Son's part, "a body was prepared him, [Hebrews 10:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.5)," and "he came in due season, made of a woman, and under the law, that he might redeem those who were under the law, [Galatians 4:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.4-5)." His incarnation alone would not have fulfilled his engagements. He must suffer: and hence, when his sufferings came upon him to the uttermost, and he felt, as a man, disposed to avoid them, he especially called to his remembrance the engagements he had entered into, and submitted to drink the cup which was put into his hands: "Now is my soul troubled: and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? But for this cause I came unto this hour. Father, glorify your name! [John 12:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.27-28)."

***~~3. All the predictions concerning him required it—~~***

The very first promise clearly pointed it out: he, as "the seed of the woman, was to bruise the serpent's head:" but in the conflict "his own heel was to be bruised, [Genesis 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.15)." To what an extent he was to suffer is fully declared: "his visage was to be so marred, more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men: and so was he to sprinkle many nations, [Isaiah 52:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 52.13-15). See also 53:4-12." Standing in the place of us who deserved utter excision, he must suffer it, [Daniel 9:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 9.26). All the sacrifices of the Mosaic law shadowed forth this awful event. He was to be a priest; but what sacrifice could he offer? He was not of the tribe to which alone the offering of animal sacrifices belonged. He had no offering but his own body: which therefore he did present; and "with his own blood he entered within the veil, there to carry on and perfect the work he had begun on earth, [Hebrews 8:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.3-4); [Hebrews 9:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.11-12)."

Looking forward to his death, he often referred to it as that which would speedily be accomplished, as the appointed means of saving a ruined world, [John 12:31-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.31-33). And, when his disciples were stumbled at his death, and regarded it as an event by which all their hopes and expectations were frustrated, he reproved them for their ignorance and unbelief, and showed them, that it had been the great subject of prophecy from the beginning of the world; and that it was necessary to the accomplishment of the work he had undertaken, [Luke 24:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.21); [Luke 24:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.25-27); [Luke 24:44-46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.44-46).

Such was the more immediate end of Christ's incarnation!

***~~II. The ultimate end of it was to reign and triumph—~~***

In overlooking the previous *humiliation*of their Messiah, the Jews greatly err: but in their expectation of a *triumphing*Messiah, they are right. He was indeed "to drink of the brook in the way;" but he was then "to lift up his head." His sufferings were to precede: but the whole Scripture attests, that a glory was to follow, [1 Peter 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.11); and by the very sufferings which he sustained, his triumphs were secured to him. He was to triumph,

***~~1. In the destruction of Satan's empire—~~***

Satan, that "murderer," had introduced sin and death into the world: and by his continual agency he is carrying forward the work of death among the sinners of mankind; and exulting in the multitudes which are daily subjected to his tyrannic sway. But Jesus, we are assured, came to weaken and destroy his empire: "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil, [1 John 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.8)."

But the point particularly to be noticed is, that Jesus was to accomplish this victory by means of his own death: "By death he was to destroy him who had the power of death." By reason of sin, all the human race was subjected to everlasting chains of darkness in the regions of despair. But Jesus, nailing to the cross the hand-writing that was against us, has cancelled it forever. Satan thought, that, when he had so far prevailed as to secure the death of the Lord Jesus, he had gained his cause: but it was that very event which gave the death-blow to all Satan's power, in that it removed the only ground on which Satan could maintain his stand against the children of men. It was by that event that Jesus satisfied the demands of law and justice, and discharged the debt which had been contracted by mankind. And, that once discharged by our Surety, we can claim our release from all obligation to pay it ourselves. Hence we are told, that Jesus, while upon the cross, "spoiled principalities and powers, triumphing over them openly in it, [Colossians 2:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.14-15)." Yes, if Jesus had, as some have feigned, gone down himself to Hell, and opened the prison-doors to those who were already there, he would not have more signally displayed his power, than he did in his death and resurrection, whereby he vanquished Satan and "led captivity itself captive."

***~~2. In the deliverance of his own people—~~***

Death being inflicted as the penalty of sin, and being a prelude to an unknown state, all men by nature dread it. Though many, through pride and thoughtlessness, may brave it on a field of battle, no man can behold its gradual approaches without a solemn apprehension of its terrors.

But the Lord Jesus would not suffer that his people would remain in such bondage; and by his death he has effectually freed them from it. The sting of death is sin: but he by his death has cancelled sin, and blotted it out as a morning cloud. The offering which has satisfied the justice of the Deity, satisfies the sinner's conscience, and brings perfect peace into the soul. And it was one end of our Lord's death to effect this; that his people might be brought into perfect liberty, and enjoy a very Heaven upon earth. To them death is now become a friend, for whose arrival to look forward with eager desire, 2 Peter 3:12; it is numbered among their treasures also, [1 Corinthians 3:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.22); and all fear, either of its present terrors, or future consequences, is removed. "The Son has made them free; and they are free indeed."

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. The captive sinner—~~***

How lamentable is it that the effects of Jesus' death would be so limited, as we see they really are! Though Satan is a vanquished enemy, there are but few who will "put their foot upon his neck." Many are his willing captives still, and love the chains with which he binds them, [2 Timothy 2:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.26). O, beloved, what a solemn thought is it, that to multitudes the incarnation and death of Christ are a curse, rather than a blessing! "Had he never come to die for them, they had not (comparatively) had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin:" and *the state of Sodom and Gomorrah is less terrible than theirs.*

When will you lay this to heart, O you who "walk according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, who works in all the children of disobedience?" Do but reflect on the account which you must hereafter give, and on the self-condemnation which you will feel in the day of judgment, when the full effects of your present disobedience will come upon you.

I cannot contemplate your condition now, or your feelings in that day, without saying with the prophet, "Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the slain of my people!" O let not all the wonders of redeeming love be in vain to you; yes, worse than in vain—a melancholy source of tenfold condemnation!

***~~2. The awakened penitent—~~***

Are you beginning to feel your sins a heavy burden? Bless and adore your God for the provision he has made for you in the Son of his love. Your guilt is expiated by your Savior's blood: and Satan, who has kept you hitherto in such cruel bondage, is dethroned. Look unto this Savior. Did he come down from Heaven? It was to seek and save the lost, yes, and the very chief of sinners. Lay hold on him; plead with God the sacrifice which he has offered; and seek a saving interest in the victories he has gained. It is for that, he has lived; for you, he has died; for you, he reigns: and never is he better satisfied with the travail of his soul, than when he sees such as you born to God through him, [Isaiah 53:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.11).

***~~3. The trembling believer—~~***

What would you have God add to all that he has done for you? What is there lacking to dispel your fears, and encourage your hearts? Are you afraid of Satan? He is a vanquished enemy. Are you afraid of death? To you it is only as the gate of Heaven. Be of good cheer. If you are weak, "your Redeemer is mighty;" and his "strength shall be perfected in your weakness." He, who for your sakes "partook of flesh and blood," with all the sinless infirmities of your nature, knows by experience all that you feel, and will afford you all needful support. Fear not, "He will not break the bruised reed, or quench the smoking flax, but will bring forth judgment unto victory." Rejoice then in him; rejoice evermore: and doubt not but that "he who has begun a good work in you, will for his own sake perfect it to the end."

***~~#2277~~***

***~~CHRIST'S POWER TO SUPPORT THE TEMPTED~~***

**[Hebrews 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.18)**

"Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."

THERE was in various respects a necessity for Christ's humiliation:  
  on our part, that, an atonement being offered for us, we might find favor with God;  
  on God's part, that his justice might be satisfied, and his law be magnified;  
  and on the part of Christ himself, that he might be qualified for the discharge of his mediatorial office.

This, having been expressly asserted in the preceding, verse, is further intimated in the words we have just read; which lead us to consider,

***~~I. The temptations of our Lord—~~***

Great and manifold were the trials which our blessed Lord sustained:

***~~1. From men—~~***

Though in his infancy he grew up in favor with men as well as with God—yet from his first entrance on his public ministry, he was an object of universal contempt and abhorrence, [Isaiah 49:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.7). He endured all manner of contradiction from all ranks and orders of men: they caviled at his words, misrepresented his actions, reviled him as an impostor, and a confederate with the devil; and, at last, apprehended, condemned, and crucified him.

***~~2. From devils—~~***

These assaulted him with fiery temptations in the wilderness, urging him to distrust, presumption, and idolatry. They attacked him with fresh vigor in the garden, when the powers of darkness combined all their force against him: and they made their last efforts against him on the cross; when, though "triumphed over and spoiled by him," they succeeded in "bruising his heel," and in bringing him down to the chambers of death.

***~~3. From God—~~***

When he stood as the surety of sinners, God exacted of him the utmost farthing of our debt. It was the Father who put the bitter cup into his hands, who laid the tremendous load of our iniquities upon him, and "bruised him," that the fragrance of his offering might ascend up as incense with acceptance before him. Compare [Isaiah 53:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.10) with [Exodus 30:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 30.36).

But, notwithstanding these sufferings of his, our text assures us of,

***~~II. His ability to support his tempted people—~~***

All his people, like him, are:  
persecuted by men,  
assailed by devils,  
and chastised by God.

But Jesus is able to support them: he has a sufficiency,

***~~1. Of power and strength—~~***

He has all power committed to him—yes, all fullness of the Godhead dwelling in him. He can bind the strong man armed, and rescue from him his wretched captives. There is nothing impossible with him. The weaker his people are, the more shall "his strength be perfected in their weakness."

***~~2. Of wisdom—~~***

As he has "power to deliver the godly out of temptations," so can he defeat all the plots of their adversaries, and take even Satan himself in his own devices. He sees every weapon that is formed against them, and knows the day and hour that their enemies set themselves against them, [Jeremiah 49:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 49.30). He discerns also the best time and manner in which to afford his aid, and so to proportion it to our necessities, as both to secure us the victory, and himself the glory.

***~~3. Of pity and compassion—~~***

He wept on account of the afflictions of his friends when he was on earth: nor will he forget to pity us, now that he is in Heaven. "The very apple of his eye is wounded, whenever any of his dear people are touched." "In all their afflictions, he is afflicted; and as, in his love and in his pity he redeemed them, and bore them, and carried them all the days of old;" so does he now, being "touched with the feeling of our infirmities," and sympathizing with us in all our troubles, [Isaiah 63:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 63.9).

Having noticed his temptations, and his ability to support us under ours—it will be proper to show,

***~~III. The connection between the two, or the dependence of the one upon the other—~~***

As God, he of necessity possessed every perfection: but, as man and mediator, he learned much from his own experience. By his own temptations:

***~~1. He learned our need of support—~~***

He himself, under his own grievous sufferings, "prayed to God with strong crying and tears, and was heard," and strengthened from above, [Hebrews 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.7) with [Luke 22:42-43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.42-43). Hence then he knows how much we must need assistance under our trials, and how certainly we must faint, if we are not supported by his almighty power.

***~~2. He acquired a right to support us—~~***

We are bought by him with the inestimable price of his own blood. And it was agreed with him in the covenant of redemption, that, "if he would make his soul an offering for sin, he would see a seed, and the pleasure of the Lord would prosper in his hands, [Isaiah 53:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.10)." Having then paid the price, he has a right to us as "his purchased possession;" and has therefore a right to convey to us whatever maybe needful for the salvation of our souls.

***~~3. He attained a disposition to support us—~~***

We are assured that "he learned obedience by the things that he suffered, [Hebrews 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.8)." Now, as obedience consists entirely in love to God and man, sympathy, which is the highest office of love, must of necessity have been learned by him, together with every other part of his duty. And how perfectly he had learned it, his address to the persecuting Saul declares, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" And it is worthy of observation, that the Apostle ascribes his sympathy to this very cause, "his having been tempted in all things like unto us, qualifying and disposing him to feel for us under our infirmities, [Hebrews 4:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.15)." Nay, further, he observes, that there was a necessity for him to be made like unto us in all things, in order that he might be a merciful and faithful High-priest in things pertaining to God; which office he could not have executed if he had not, by his own sufferings, been enabled to sympathize with us, [Hebrews 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.17).

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who are conflicting with temptations—~~***

The Lord's people still are assaulted with manifold temptations. Satan is not idle: he still "desires to sift us as wheat," and still "as a roaring lion goes about, seeking whom he may devour." There is not a saint whom he does not labor to "corrupt from the simplicity that is in Christ," and for this end he still on many occasions "transforms himself into an angel of light."

But however severe your outward or inward trials may be, you have the comfort to reflect that *Christ endured the same before you, and is able to afford you effectual support*. Do not think then that your difficulties peculiar or insurmountable; but assure yourselves of his sympathy and care; and be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might."

***~~2. Those who are yielding to their temptations—~~***

Excuse not your compliances by pleading the frailty of your nature; for "Christ 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](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 9.8)." Continue not then under unmortified tempers, or criminal neglects; but call on the Lord, who "will not allow you to be tempted above that you are able; but will, with the temptation, make also a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it! [1 Corinthians 10:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.13)." I say again, plead not in excuse, the corruption of your nature, or the difficulties of your situation: for grace which is not effectual, is no grace. The very weakest among you may say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," and, though assaulted by all the powers of darkness, shall be "more than conqueror through him who loved me!"

***~~#2278~~***

***~~NAMES AND OFFICES OF CHRIST~~***

***~~[Hebrews 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.1)~~***

"Holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus."

OUR Lord possessed, from all eternity, a nature infinitely superior to that of angels, [Hebrews 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.3); [Hebrews 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.8); [Hebrews 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.10); yet did he submit to the lowest humiliation for us [Philippians 2:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.6-7). And it is by the knowledge of him, as humbled, that we attain salvation, [John 17:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.8).

The Apostle having spoken much on this subject in the foregoing chapter, enforces it with this affectionate exhortation—

***~~I. Explain the exhortation—~~***

***~~The first thing that calls for our attention is the description which he gives of all true Christians—~~***

Wishing to persuade, he strove by tenderness to conciliate their esteem: he calls them *brethren*; which they are, both by relation, [Matthew 23:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 23.9), and affection, [1 John 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.14).

They are "holy;" set apart for the service and enjoyment of God—washed in the fountain of Christ's blood, and renewed after the Divine image.

They are "partakers of a heavenly calling;" called to heavenly exercises and enjoyments—obedient to that call—and suitably influenced by it in their hearts and lives. How amiable is such a character! "Brethren!" "holy!" "called!" etc. Who would not wish to be found of their number!

***~~The next thing which demands our notice is the object he sets before them—~~***

When he speaks of Christ in common, he places the name "Jesus" first; but when he speaks with more than ordinary solemnity, the name "Christ" is first. He here describes the Savior both by his names and offices.

His names: "Christ". It is of the same import as Messiah, [John 1:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.44) and means Anointed. Jesus is the same with Joshua, [Hebrews 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.8); and Joshua is a contraction for Jah Oseah, the former of which signifies God, and the latter Savior. This name was given by God to Hoseah the son of Nun, who, as a type of Christ, led the Israelites into the land of Canaan: and the giving of this name to the Virgin's Son may be justly considered as an accomplishment of that prophecy which said he would be called Emmanuel, God with us. Its import therefore is "Divine Savior"—which is are peculiarly significant in this connection. His offices are such as Moses and Aaron sustained under the law. Christ is "the Apostle of our profession," as being sent, like Moses, to publish that religion which we profess. He is also "the High-priest of it," because, like Aaron, he performs all that is necessary for our reconciliation with God Jesus, as our High-priest, offered himself a sacrifice for us.

He has gone into the holy of holies to present his blood before the mercy-seat.

He lives to make intercession for us. He presents our offerings unto the Father.

He bears us on his breast-plate.

He and makes known to us the will of God.

***~~The last thing to explain is the duty which he presses upon them—~~***

The word which we translate "consider," implies an attentive regard. It might easily be shown how important this duty is; but our observations on this subject will occur more properly in another place.

Having spoken what was necessary to unfold the meaning of the exhortation, we proceed to,

***~~II. Enforce it—~~***

To those who answer the foregoing character we address the exhortation:

***~~1. Consider the object set before you—~~***

His NAMES—

As "Jesus," Divine Savior, he is able to save to the uttermost. As "Christ," he was anointed of God for this very purpose. Had he not been appointed of God, or had he been less than God, you might have been afraid to trust in him; but his names attest his right and ability to save. Think how these words would sound in Hell; and let them be as sweet to you as they would be to the unhappy spirits there.

His OFFICES—

As the Apostle or *Prophet*of the Church, he will instruct all, [Matthew 11:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.29); As the *High-priest*, he will open a way for us into the holy place, [Hebrews 10:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.19-20); O reflect on these, until your hearts burn within you with gratitude and love!

***~~2. Consider more particularly the view given of him in the preceding and following context—~~***

His compassion as a high-priest—

He himself has endured persecution from men, temptation from Satan, desertion from God, etc. [Hebrews 2:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.17-18); he will sympathize with you under your trials, [Hebrews 4:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.15). This may be further illustrated by the care of a refiner, whom Christ is said to resemble, [Malachi 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.3). Let this be a source of comfort to you under every affliction.

His faithfulness as a Prophet—

He extends his care to all his people, [Hebrews 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.2); he never suffered the weakest believer to err finally, [Isaiah 35:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.8); nor will he fail to guide us aright, [Isaiah 30:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 30.21). [Psalm 73:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.24). Go to him then for teaching in every doubt and every difficulty.

Those who do not answer to the character may reap benefit from the exhortation—

You who are unholy, and strangers to the heavenly calling, consider this description of our blessed Lord. Consider it with attention, that you may understand it:  
with *faith*, that you may have a saving interest in it;  
with *affection*, that you may delight in it,  
with *gratitude*, that you may display its influence in your heart.

 This subject may be reduced to more of unity and simplicity, thus, mark:

***~~I. What OFFICES the Lord Jesus Christ sustains for us—~~***

Every religion has its apostles, who propagate it, and its priests, who perform its rites. Of our religion, our incarnate God, the Lord Jesus Christ—is both the Apostle and High-priest. These offices were assigned to him from eternity, [Psalm 40:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.6-8). He executed them faithfully when on earth; the prophetic, [Hebrews 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.2); [Hebrews 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.3); the priestly, [Hebrews 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.3); [Hebrews 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.14); [Hebrews 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.17). He still discharges them for the good of his people; as a *prophet*, teaching them by his Spirit, [John 16:7-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.7-11); as a *priest*, compassionating and relieving all their spiritual necessities, [Hebrews 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.18); [Hebrews 4:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.15).

***~~II. Our duty towards Him in relation to them—~~***

We should consider him in these characters:  
with attention, that we may have the fullest knowledge of him;  
with faith, that we derive all benefit from them;  
with gratitude, that we may give him the glory of them.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who profess to be "partakers of the heavenly calling"—~~***

If indeed you have experienced the power of divine grace, you will need no incentives to this duty. To contemplate the Lord Jesus Christ in all his excellency and glory, will be the richest delight of your souls.

***~~2. To those who are strangers to this holy exercise—~~***

Alas! what do you lose! There is no other subject under Heaven that would so repay your labor. The more you delight yourselves in Christ, the more evidence you will have of his grace in your souls, and the better preparation for his glory.

***~~#2279~~***

***~~CHRIST'S SUPERIORITY TO MOSES~~***

***~~[Hebrews 3:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.5-6)~~***

"Moses was faithful as a *servant*in all God's house, testifying to what would be said in the future.  
 But Christ is faithful as a *son*over God's house.  
 And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast."

IN order to have a just conception of the Christian dispensation, we must above all things acquire scriptural views of the person of Christ, as God and man, and of his mediatorial character, as Emmanuel, *God with us*. It is in this latter view more especially, that we are led to contemplate him throughout this whole epistle. As God, he is "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person;" while, as man, "he has purged our sins, and is set down on the right hand of the Majesty on high, [Hebrews 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.3);" but it is as God and man in one Christ that his sacrifice becomes effectual for this great end. It is in his mediatorial capacity, as God-man, that he is exalted above all the angels in Heaven, who are expressly enjoined to "worship him, [Hebrews 1:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.4-6)." And it is in the same capacity that we are now called upon to "consider him as the Apostle and High-priest of our profession, verse 1." As "the Apostle" of our profession, sent like Moses, to instruct us in the mind and will of God, he is superior to Moses, whose instructions he is sent to supersede. And, in like manner, will his superiority to Aaron also be declared, when we shall come, in a subsequent part of this epistle, to consider his priesthood. It is the comparison between him and Moses which alone we have to notice at this time.

We proceed then to mark,

**I. The superiority of Christ to Moses—**

**The character given of Moses is most exalted—**

He was "faithful in all God's house, [Numbers 12:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 12.7)." From the first moment of his undertaking the office that was assigned him, he was faithful in the discharge of it. Whatever was commanded him to do, he did; adding nothing, omitting nothing, neglecting nothing. Whether the commands were moral or ceremonial, he was observant of the minutest direction that was given him. He was aware that all which he was commissioned to say or do, had respect to a future period, and was intended to shadow forth something under a future dispensation: and so accurate was he in every particular, that there is not the smallest lack of agreement between the Jewish and Christian codes, the one answering to the other, as the coin to the die by which it is stamped. As the tabernacle, even to the smallest pin, was "made according to the pattern show to him in the mount;" so was that whole dispensation in perfect accordance with that under which we live.

Much he had to try him, and to shake his fidelity: but he was immoveable. Nothing could for a moment divert him from his duty, or cause him to relax his efforts in his Master's cause. And in this fidelity he stood alone. Aaron and Miriam both turned aside from the path of duty; yes, both confederated even against Moses himself. But Moses was steadfast to the end—unmoved, unwearied, unrestrained.

**But Christ in this respect was exalted infinitely above him—**

Christ also was faithful in all his house. He delivered nothing which he had not previously heard and learned of his Father: but all which had been given him either to do or teach, he did and taught with all imaginable fidelity: yes, and what he was ordained to suffer also for the sins of men, he patiently endured, drinking the bitter cup even to the dregs, and never stopping until he could say, in relation to it all, "It is finished!"

Thus far the two may be supposed to have been upon an equality. But there are some points of difference between them, which exalt the office and character of Christ far above that of Moses.  
  
Moses was "a servant in the house of another:" Christ was a Son, or Lord, "over his own house."  
  
Moses only instructed his house: but Christ was the very source and builder of the house he governed; every member of it having been created by his power, and redeemed by his blood, and converted by his grace. The house itself would have had no existence but for him. Now, as the builder of a house, whether in a literal, political, or religious sense, must be far above the work which he has prepared; so must Christ, who formed his house, be far above every member of it: and as being the only true source of everything in the Church, he must be truly and properly "God, verse 4;" and consequently have infinitely higher glory than Moses, who was only a member of the very house which he himself was appointed to instruct and govern.

That this superiority of his is not a mere speculative point, will appear, if we consider,

**II. Our saving interest in it—**

**"We are his house"—**

The Church is called in Scripture "the house of God, [1 Timothy 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 3.15);" and if we have truly believed in Christ, we are that house. We are:  
  those for whom all the wonders of redeeming love were planned;  
  those for whom all that Christ has ever executed was undertaken;  
  those for whose sake he has hitherto ordered all things both in Heaven and earth;  
  those over whom he still watches with his peculiar care;  
  those for whom he is engaged to complete the work he has begun.  
  
Wonderful thought! We are his house, his family, his peculiar people!

What an honor! What a privilege! What a blessing!

But it is here taken for granted, that we have believed in him, and made him the one foundation of all our hopes, and boldly confessed him in the presence of the ungodly world:

**And under this character we have appropriate duties and obligations—**

We must "hold fast our confidence, and the rejoicing of our hope firm unto the end." We shall have difficulties to encounter, even as Moses and Christ had: but we must endure like them, being "steadfast, immovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord." Whatever we may meet with, we must not for a moment be moved away from the hope of the Gospel: we must stand fast in:  
  our principles, [Ephesians 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.14);  
  our practice, [Hebrews 10:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.26);  
  our profession, [Hebrews 10:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.23);  
for on our steadfastness in these things our ultimate acceptance with him depends. "If we are dead with him, we shall also live with him: but if we deny him, he will deny us. And if we believe not (either the one or other of these sayings)—yet he abides faithful to his word; he cannot deny himself, [2 Timothy 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.12);" He will be with us, while we are with him. If we seek him, he will he found of us: but if we forsake him, he will forsake us, [2 Chronicles 15:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 15.2).

**Improvement—**

**1. Let us put ourselves under his direction—**

Christ is the great Head and Lord of all. From him we must receive directions, as he did from his Father, and as Moses did also.  
Nothing is to be done by us but according to his word;  
nothing is to be done which he has forbidden;  
nothing is to be omitted which he has commanded:  
no deviation is to be admitted in a way of excess or defect.

If doubt at any time arise respecting the path of duty, we must consult him, and not proceed, until we have attained, so far as we can attain, the knowledge of his will. Human opinions are to have no weight with us in opposition to his word. And if we see not as yet the reasons of his commands, as Moses certainly did not in relation to the ceremonial law, we are not on that account to disobey them, but in all humility to comply with them, saying, "What I know not now, I shall know hereafter, [John 13:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.6-7)."

Nor are we to complain of any commandment as difficult or self-denying; but to disregard even life itself, if by the sacrifice of it He may be glorified, [Philippians 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.20). Admirable was the lesson which the Jews were taught in the wilderness: if the pillar and the cloud moved for several days and nights together, they continued to follow it: and if it was stationary for a year together, they were stationary also. Thus it would be with us: we should move when, and where, and as the Lord prescribes, and in that way alone, to the last hour of our lives!

**2. Let us endeavor to approve ourselves to him in our respective spheres—**

He walked among the seven golden candlesticks, the seven Churches of Asia, and declared to each of them, *"I know your works!"* And still are his eyes as a flame of fire to penetrate the inmost recesses of our hearts. We must not therefore be satisfied with walking irreproachably before men, but must labor to approve ourselves to Him who searches the heart and tries the thoughts. We must be attentive not to our actions only, but to our motives and principles, that, if possible, every thought may be brought into captivity to his will. We must seek to obtain from God that testimony which he bore to Moses, that we are "faithful in all our house." Let us look to it, that as parents and children, masters and servants, rulers and subjects, we do all that he has required of us. Let us labor to "serve him with a perfect heart;" so that in all our commerce with men, and in our secret walk with God, we may have "the witness of his Spirit, that we please him [Hebrews 11:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.5);" and may receive from him in the last day that testimony of his approbation, "Well done, good and faithful servants, enter into the joy of your Lord!"

**3. Let us expect from him all that he has undertaken for us—**

Still does he superintend the concerns of his Church: and though he has wrought much for us—yet is there much that yet remains to be done, and much that he has promised to be accomplished. But "his promises are sure to all his seed, [Romans 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.16);" not one of them shall ever fail: nor shall even the least member of his house ever have occasion to complain that he was disappointed of his hope. Joshua's testimony shall be that of all the Church in the last day, that "of all which God has promised, not one thing has failed! [Joshua 23:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 23.14)." Take hold then of his promises, and plead them before him. If they appear too great to be fulfilled, "stagger not at them, but hope against hope, and be strong in faith, giving glory to God, [Romans 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.18); [Romans 4:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.20)." If your tribulations are great, let them not for a moment obstruct your rejoicing in him; but "maintain your glorying firm unto the end." See the utmost desires of a bleeding soul all concentrated in one short prayer; and, for the accomplishment of them, rest not merely on the love and power of Jesus, but on his fidelity: and when you have been praying that the very God of peace would sanctify you wholly, and that your whole spirit, and soul, and body, may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, then add, "Faithful is He who has called me, who also will do it! [1 Thessalonians 5:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.23-24)."

***~~#2280~~***

***~~AGAINST DEPARTING FROM GOD~~***

**[Hebrews 3:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.12-14)**

"Take heed, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly until the end the confidence we had at first."

THE consideration of the fullness and sufficiency of Christ, is that which animates the believer in all his conflicts. Yet it is on no account to supersede our own care and watchfulness: on the contrary, it affords us the greatest encouragement to watch, because it ensures success to us in our endeavors, which, without his Almighty aid, would be of no avail.

In this view it is that the inspired writer calls us to "consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus, who was not merely a *servant*, like Moses—but a *son*, the Heir and Lord of all, yes, the very builder of that spiritual house, of which we profess ourselves to be a part." On this truth he grounds the exhortation in the text All the words between "why," in verse 7, and the text, are a parenthesis: we must therefore connect the text thus, "Therefore," "take heed," etc, in which he suggests,

***~~I. A solemn caution—~~***

As difficult as it is to *come*to God, we find it but too easy to *depart*from him. We should therefore be on our guard:

***~~1. Against any departure from him—~~***

While men are yielding to temptation, and turning aside from the ways of God, they cherish a hope that they may still preserve their interest in his favor, though they are not studious to do his will. But a departure of any kind, whether from the faith or practice of Christianity, is nothing less than a departure from God himself, even from him who is the only source of life and happiness. We cannot therefore be too much on our guard against any secret declensions, which are so *dishonorable*to him whom we profess to love, and so *destructive*of our present and eternal welfare.

***~~2. Against that unbelief from whence all declensions arise—~~***

As *faith*is that which brings us to God, and keeps us steadfast in our adherence to him—so *unbelief*separates us from him, and, in proportion as it is harbored, invariably alienates us from the life of God. Whatever the more immediate object of that unbelief is, whether we attempt to lower the strictness of God's precepts, or question the veracity of his promises or threatenings—it proceeds equally from "an evil heart," and brings with it the same pernicious consequences: it is a root of bitterness, which, if it is permitted to spring up, will cause every devout affection to wither and decay. We must therefore labor to eradicate it, if we would not eat forever its bitter fruits!

That his caution may have its due effect, the Apostle prescribes,

***~~II. The means of improving it—~~***

***~~Sin is of a deceitful and hardening nature—~~***

When "a backslider in heart" commits a sin, many thoughts will arise in his mind to *palliate the evil*, and to make him think that it will not be attended with any significant consequences. Soon he begins to doubt whether the thing is evil at all. And, before long, he begins *to justify it from the peculiarity of his circumstances*. At first he felt some remorse; but presently his conscience becomes less tender, until at last it is altogether seared and callous; so that, notwithstanding he is miserably departed from God, he is regardless of his loss, and insensible of his danger! Who that has ever noticed the workings of his own heart, has not found what a bewitching and besotting thing sin is? Yes, who has not often seen reason to bewail its deceitful, hardening effects!

***~~To guard effectually against it, we should watch over each other—~~***

Sin, from the foregoing qualities, naturally hides itself from our view, and renders us inattentive to the means of prevention. But *as ignorant as we often are of our own spirit, we see clearly enough the defects of others; yes, perhaps we condemn with severity in others the very things which we allow in ourselves*. To watch over each other therefore, and to warn each other of those declensions which we either see or apprehend, is a most valuable service; and, if performed with discretion and love, it can scarcely fail of producing the happiest effects.

This is a duty to which God has solemnly called us in his word, [Leviticus 19:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 19.17); and it is to be a part of our "daily" work. Our time for it will be very short: either we or our brother may be speedily removed; and our opportunity of benefitting his soul may be lost for ever. We should exhort one another therefore "daily, while it is called Today;" and, though it is often an unpleasant office, we should use all fidelity in the execution of it. By this means we may restore a brother before he has relapsed too far, and preserve him from that departure from God, which would otherwise terminate in his destruction.

Still further to enforce the caution given us, the Apostle adds,

***~~III. A motive to regard it—~~***

***~~Our final participation of Christ's saving benefits, depends on our steadfastness in the pursuit of them—~~***

Without entering into the question, whether God has decreed the final perseverance of the saints, we may be fully assured that none can attain salvation but by persevering in the way of holiness to the end of life. The Scriptures continually speak this language, "He who *endures*to the end, the same shall be saved:" "but if any man draws back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him, [Matthew 24:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.13). [Hebrews 10:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.38)." It is true that believers are already in a measure "partakers of Christ;" but the complete enjoyment of his benefits is reserved for the future life: and we must not only have a scriptural and well-founded confidence at first, but must keep it steadfast even to the end, in order to attain that full possession of our inheritance.

You may call yourselves "brethren," and may boast of "your confidence in Christ:" but it is to you, yes, to all of you, that the caution is addressed; and to you I address myself, saying, "Take heed lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief," and "lest any of You be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."

***~~If anything can stimulate us to caution, surely this must—~~***

Eternity is at stake, and depends on our present conduct: according as we approve ourselves to the heart-searching God, will our state be fixed forever. Is it not madness to be remiss and careless under such circumstances? Would anyone, who would have reason to think his house were on fire, sit still without endeavoring to find out the grounds of his alarm?

Just so, shall we know our proneness to unbelief, and not guard against its operation, lest it prevail against us, and lead us to apostasy? Shall we acknowledge the deceitful, hardening nature of sin—and not exhort each other to mortify and subdue it? Surely, if we have the smallest concern for our own souls and the souls of others, we shall not only regard the caution given us in the text, but shall labor to improve it in the way prescribed.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who have never come to God at all—~~***

The foregoing subject is in itself only applicable to those who profess religion; but it may be accommodated to those also who make no such profession, for:

if those who have come to God, are in danger of departing from him,  
if those who have enjoyed a scriptural confidence, may lose it;  
if those who have believed, may "make shipwreck of their faith," if those who have "begun in the Spirit, may end in the flesh;"  
if those who have "begun to run well, may be hindered,"  
if those who have "escaped the pollutions of the world, may again be entangled therein and overcome;"  
lastly, if those who "have been enlightened, and have tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the world to come, may so fall away as never to be renewed unto repentance;"  
—then what must become of those who have *never*experienced any of these things? Can they be safe? Can they have any scriptural hope of Heaven?

If the strongest have so much need of caution, and the most circumspect such reason to fear the deceitful, hardening effects of sin—then surely the careless have need to tremble, lest they "die in their sins," and "be driven away in their wickedness."

If all, except two, of those who came out of Egypt, perished in the wilderness—then can they hope to enter into the heavenly Canaan, who have never once come forth from their spiritual bondage?

The point is clear! May God enable us to lay it to heart, and to consider it with the attention it deserves!

***~~2. Those who are conflicting with their spiritual enemies—~~***

Much has already been spoken to you both in a way of *caution*and direction: we beg permission to add a word of *encouragement*. The thing against which you are chiefly guarded, is unbelief; because that is the true source of all apostasy. We now would say: Be strong in faith, giving glory to God. "Faith is the shield with which you are to quench the fiery darts" of your enemies. Only believe, and Omnipotence will come to your support. Only believe, and you shall experience "the mighty working of his power, who raised Christ from the dead." Commit yourself to him "who is able to keep you from falling; and he will present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy."

***~~#2281~~***

***~~CANAAN TYPICAL OF THE BELIEVER'S SPIRITUAL AND ETERNAL REST~~***

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

"Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it."

THE histories of the Old Testament are very instructive to us. The divine interpositions, as well in a way of judgment as of mercy, show us what to expect from God, [1 Corinthians 10:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.11). The Apostle has been recording the destruction of the Jews in the wilderness Hebrews 3; and from thence he takes occasion to urge us to holy fear and diligence—

Consider:

***~~I. What is that rest which God has promised us—~~***

The rest promised to the *Israelites*was the land of Canaan: but the Israelites had already for many hundred years possessed that land. The rest therefore, which David speaks of as yet future, must be a rest of which Canaan was only a type or shadow. It includes:

***~~1. A present rest in Christ—~~***

A soul ignorant of Christ, can have no rest; but "by believing in Christ it has peace with God." This is that rest which our Savior promises to troubled souls, [Matthew 11:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.28).

***~~2. A future rest in Heaven—~~***

The rest of the soul is never perfect in this life: tribulations are the way through which we are all to pass; but in Heaven our happiness will be complete: that therefore must be the rest in which our labors shall terminate, [Revelation 14:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 14.13).

***~~Of this rest God has left us a promise in his word—~~***

It is called *his*, because he has prepared it for us from the beginning. It is his also, inasmuch as it is the gift of his sovereign grace. It is his moreover, as enjoyed in and with him; nor has he only revealed it as an object worthy of our pursuit, but promised it to every penitent and believing sinner, [Acts 2:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.39).

It befits us then to inquire,

***~~II. What effect the promise of this rest should have upon us?~~***

The news of any great and unexpected acquisition immediately produces strong emotions in our minds.

***~~The prospect therefore of present and eternal rest would surely excite much solicitude respecting it—~~***

We should endeavor to ascertain our title to it.

We should fear lest by any means we be deprived of it.

Nor should we account anything too much to do in order to obtain it.

Our vigilance and zeal should be proportioned to its value.

***~~The danger of coming short of it should increase our diligence in the pursuit of it—~~***

Of six hundred thousand that came out of Egypt, only two entered into Canaan: the others "could not enter in by reason of their unbelief." And how much unbelief is there in our hearts! Yet, if we live under its power, we in vain hope for this rest: nor will the numbers of those who are so circumstanced, afford security to us, any more than it did to those who perished in the wilderness. Surely then we should "fear lest we perish after their example."

***~~The misery of coming short of it should also stimulate our exertions—~~***

There is no intermediate state between Heaven and Hell; nor will there be any other state of probation afforded us. Those who do not truly rest in Christ, can never know solid peace in this world; nor will they experience anything but tribulation to all eternity, [2 Thessalonians 1:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 1.8-9). [Revelation 14:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 14.10-11). There will be an impassable gulf between them and Heaven. What fear and caution should this thought excite!

***~~We should fear lest we even "seem" to come short of it—~~***

To be in suspense about our eternal state is dreadful: God's honor, as well as our happiness, is affected by it. We should seek to be "always triumphing in Christ," and at last to have "an abundant entrance into his kingdom."

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. To those who have no fears about their souls—~~***

Your rest, such as it is, is by no means to be desired. It will soon vanish in the prospect of death and judgment, and it will speedily terminate in everlasting woe! Seek then the true rest, while yet it may be found: seek it in Christ, who alone can impart it to you; nor doubt but that it will abundantly recompense your labors.

***~~2. To those who are filled with slavish fears—~~***

These are not fears which you ought to entertain: they are calculated to rob you of the heavenly rest, rather than to bring you into it. The fear you should cultivate, is a jealous and watchful fear: to live under the influence of this, is to be truly blessed, [Proverbs 28:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.14); this well consists with even a present rest in the Lord Jesus. Lay hold then on the promise which is left you in the Gospel, and expect that "He who has promised will also perform:" they "who trust in the Lord, shall never be confounded."

***~~3. To those who maintain a godly fear and jealousy—~~***

Disputes about the doctrine of perseverance are unprofitable and vain; but to unite a jealousy over ourselves with a confidence in God, will guard us against mistakes on either hand. Go on then in this good way, in which there is no danger of error or excess: thus will your soul be kept at an equal distance from presumption and despondency, and the attainment of your rest be perfectly secured!

***~~#2282~~***

***~~THE REASON WHY MEN ARE SO LITTLE PROFITED BY THE GOSPEL~~***

***~~[Hebrews 4:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.2)~~***

"For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith."

The Apostle is showing the superiority of Christ to Moses, Moses being a *servant*only in God's house, but Christ being a *Son*and Lord over his own house. "That house are we," says he, "if we hold fast the confidence, and the rejoicing of our hope, firm unto the end, [Hebrews 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.6)." To impress this idea the more strongly on our minds, he, in the language of David, urges us to guard against a departure from God, lest, like the Israelites of old, we provoke God to cut us off from his promised rest.

But regarding the very passage which he quotes, since though all the adults who came out of Egypt perished in the wilderness, their children did enjoy the promised rest, he intimates, that the very expression of David showed that *Canaan was only a shadow of the rest promised to Israel, and that the true rest was common to all the children of Abraham, whether Jews or Gentiles*. Of this rest, he exhorts us not to come short: for that the promise relating to it belonged to us as much as to the Jews in the time of Moses: and, as they came short of it in consequence of their unbelief—so shall we, if we mix not faith with the truths we hear.

Now this view of the Apostle's words limits the term "Gospel" to that which alone is mentioned in the context, the "promised rest." Hence, to compare the Gospel, as revealed to the Jews by Moses and the Prophets, with that which is revealed to us by Christ and his Apostles in a general view, would be beside the proper scope of our text. It would be profitable indeed to see how the *moral*law shuts us up to Christ, and how the *ceremonial*law shadows forth his work and offices; and how the *Prophets*also declare the fullness and excellency of his salvation; or, in the words of the Apostle, how "the righteousness which is by faith in Christ is witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, [Romans 3:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.21-22);" but we prefer confining our views to the precise idea that was in the Apostle's mind, because we then have more clearly the mind of the Holy Spirit. This then we shall do, while we endeavor to show,

***~~I. What is that Gospel which is preached to us in common with the Jews—~~***

***~~To the Jews were sent "the glad tidings" of a promised rest—~~***

The promise given to them included three things, deliverance, preservation, rest:  
deliverance from Egypt,  
preservation in the wilderness,  
and rest in Canaan.

Their deliverance was to be by the blood of the paschal lamb, which, being sprinkled on their doorposts, was to protect them from the sword of the destroying angel, while all the first-born of Egypt were slain. That it was which burst their bands asunder, and caused their former masters not merely to liberate them from their bondage, but to thrust them out from among them: and from that time they were in all future ages to kill and eat the paschal lamb in remembrance of that great deliverance.

From thenceforth, committing themselves to the Divine guidance and protection, they were to exist entirely on the *manna*given them from the clouds, and on the *water*that issued from the rock. At the expiration of the time appointed for their sojourning in the wilderness, they were to enter into Canaan, there to serve and enjoy God as their God to the last generations.

Now all this was to the Jews "a *shadow*of good things to come:" it marked the ways and means of our redemption; the nature of that life of faith which we are to live, and the happy termination of our labors. And, that it was so understood by the more spiritual among them, is evident, as from many other passages, so particularly from that quoted both in the foregoing and following context: for if the rest promised by Moses had had no reference to anything beyond the land of Canaan, David could never, after that rest had been enjoyed for five hundred years, have spoken of a rest yet future. Consequently, the *typical*nature of that whole dispensation was made known to them; and though obscurely—yet certainly, was the Gospel of Christ preached to them.

***~~To us is the same rest presented as an object of faith and hope—~~***

We are to be *delivered*from a worse than Egyptian bondage—even from the bonds of sin and Satan, death and Hell. And in the very same manner also are we to be delivered. "Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us:" and by the sprinkling of his blood on our hearts and consciences we are to escape the wrath of God. "We have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins, [Ephesians 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.7)." The destroying angel has received his commission against all on whom this mark is not found: and he will execute it on all without partiality or reserve: for, as "without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins," so it is by a believing application of that blood to our souls, and by that only, that we can ever obtain from Christ the benefits of his salvation.

Our *preservation*during the whole of our pilgrimage must also be secured in the same way. While under the guidance and protection of our God, we must "live altogether by faith in the Son of God, who loved us, and gave himself for us." Our blessed Lord himself has told us that He is the bread of life: that we must live from day to day upon him, even as the Israelites did upon the manna in the wilderness; and that, whereas they derived from it only the temporary support of their mortal bodies, we shall secure from him the eternal welfare of our souls!

Paul also tells us, that the *rock*which poured forth its waters in the wilderness was Christ; that is, *a type and figure of Christ*. We learn therefore from this, that we are to look to Christ for daily supplies of his Spirit, to renew and sanctify us, and to refresh and comfort us throughout the whole of our weary pilgrimage.

This is to be the one constant tenor of our way from first to last. Never until we arrive in the promised land shall we cease to need these supplies, which are to be brought to us by the exercise of a living faith. There is no substitute for them: the life of the Israelites in the wilderness is a perfect pattern of our life; and to theirs we are taught to conform our own.

To "the rest which remains for us, verse 9," we are taught to look forward with high expectations and assured confidence. There is a better country than Canaan, even Heaven itself, which the patriarchs, to whom the land of Canaan was promised, themselves regarded as their destined home, [Hebrews 11:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.9-10); [Hebrews 11:13-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.13-16). And to that must we look as our inheritance. "There, we shall rest from all our labors," there, shall all tears be wiped away from our eyes. There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying; neither shall there be any more pain: but, having his tabernacle with us, we shall dwell with him and he with us more intimately than we have now any conception of; we being his acknowledged people, and he our endeared God, for ever and ever, [Revelation 21:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.3-4).

But as this Gospel has not yet produced what it was destined to accomplish, it will be proper to show,

***~~II. To what must be ascribed its inefficacy both in them and us—~~***

The Gospel itself is not destitute of power:  
it is "the rod of God's strength:"  
it is "living and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword:"  
it is "mighty through God to the pulling down of the strongholds of sin and Satan:"  
it is the power of God unto salvation to all who truly believe it.

Yet its operations have been very limited and partial. And whence arises this? I answer,

***~~The Jews "mixed not faith with what they heard"—~~***

Moses from the beginning told them of all the blessings which God had in reserve for them: yet from the beginning they were an unbelieving people. Though Moses had given them abundant evidence of his divine mission, they murmured against him, when they found their burdens augmented in consequence of his interposition, [Exodus 5:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 5.21-23). When they had seen all the wonders wrought in their behalf in Egypt, they again complained, as soon as ever they saw the hosts of Pharaoh pressing upon their rear, and ready, as they thought, to overwhelm them, [Exodus 14:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 14.11-12).

When they had passed through the sea on dry ground, and seen their enemies, who presumed to follow them, dead upon the sea shore, they were still as unbelieving as ever, and regretted that they had ever been induced to leave the land of Egypt. They even questioned "whether God were among them or not, [Exodus 17:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 17.3-4); [Exodus 17:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 17.7)." And a few weeks afterwards they altogether renounced God, and worshiped the golden calf.

Thus it was on all occasions, whenever any fresh difficulty arose, they distrusted God, and murmured against him. When the spies brought their report of the land which they had searched out, the people universally gave way to despondency, as much as if they had never seen any one display of God's power in their behalf. On this account they were all doomed to perish in the wilderness, "God swearing in his wrath that they would not enter into his rest." In a word, "they could not enter in because of unbelief, [Hebrews 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.19)."

***~~We also are alike unbelieving in relation to the truths we hear—~~***

The very necessity of redemption is denied by professing multitudes, or at least is acknowledged only in a speculative way, and without any due sense of its importance. The Jews under the pressure of their burdens cried mightily to God, so that their groans entered into the ears of the Lord Almighty. But when has he heard from us those sighs and groans by reason of the pressure of our sins? When has he heard those earnest cries for deliverance from the guilt we have contracted, and from the power of our indwelling corruptions? Alas! when urged on these subjects, we reply in our hearts, "Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians! [Exodus 14:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 14.12)."

If told, that "the whole world lies in wickedness," and that we must flee from it, as Lot from Sodom, if we will escape its ruin—then we despise the warning, like the sons-in-law of Lot, and regard our monitor as "one who only mocks us" with absurd and groundless alarms.

If brought to give a general assent to the truths we hear, we still do not approve of a *life of faith*as the means of our final preservation:

Why must we subject ourselves to so many trials and difficulties?

Why may we not go in an easier way to Heaven?

Why must our separation from the world be so entire?

Why may we not still enjoy the leeks and onions of Egypt, instead of subsisting upon the light and tasteless food provided for us?

Why must we be so dependent?

Why must we be looking every day and hour to the pillar and cloud for direction, and never to follow my own way?

Why am I to have nothing in myself, but all in Christ?

Why would I be necessitated to seek such a measure of sanctification, as not to entertain a "thought that is not brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ?"

We choose to have greater liberty, and an easier path. We choose to have a less humiliating way, where we may derive some supplies from a stock of our own, and be able to ascribe some measure of credit to ourselves.

Nor are we by any means satisfied with the *rest*that is provided for us. We wish for some rest in earthly things; and murmur at the prohibition to seek it in them. Why must I have as the one object of my desire, a portion that is invisible? Of the Israelites it is said, "they despised the pleasant land; they believed not God's Word, [Psalm 106:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 106.24);" and the same may be said of us:

We do not estimate aright the felicity of Heaven.

We do not despise everything else in comparison with it.

We do not follow after it with the ardor that we ought.

We show, in the whole of our life and conduct, that we do not think the prize worth the toil necessary to secure it.

Were we duly impressed with the excellency of Canaan as "the glory of all lands—we would grudge no labors or sufferings that we may have to encounter in our way to it, nor any exertions that may be necessary for the attainment of it.

What I have here said is applicable to the great mass even of the Christian world: and the true reason of their being so little influenced by all that they hear, is, that they do not mix faith with it. *They either account it a cunningly-devised fable, or else imagine that some way shall be found for the salvation of their souls, other than that which is revealed in the written Word*. They believe not what God has spoken either of the *way*, or of the *end*—and therefore they fall short of that end, and perish in their unbelief!

***~~To impress this subject the more deeply on our minds, I will endeavor to improve it:~~***

***~~1. In a way of solemn inquiry—~~***

It surely is reasonable for all of us to inquire: What have we "profited by the Gospel?" If we have indeed been profited by it, we can tell, in some degree at least, what are the benefits which we have received from it. To imagine that we have been really benefitted, and not to know wherein we have been benefitted, and especially in a matter of such infinite importance, is palpable and willful self-deception! I ask then:

How have we been profited by the Gospel?

What effect has it produced upon our minds in relation to the things before spoken of?

What have we experienced of a spiritual redemption?

What are we yet daily experiencing of a life of faith in the Son of God?

How far does the prospect of eternal glory animate us to do and suffer all things for the attainment of it?

I beg you, brethren, put these questions to yourselves, and satisfy not yourselves with a superficial or evasive answer. Bring forth the benefits which you have received: examine them; see how far they are of a saving nature, and bear the stamp and character of a work of grace upon the soul!

If such inquiries are unnecessary, trouble not yourselves about them: but, if they will be made at the last day by the Judge of living and the dead, and will form the ground of your salvation or condemnation to all eternity, then let them be duly weighed, and impartially answered by every one of us. For, if we are not profited by the Gospel now, I am sure that we shall not be profited in the eternal world; yes, rather, that very "word which ought to have been to us a savor of life unto life, will be to us a savor of death unto death! 2 Corinthians 2:16."

You all remember how greatly the guilt of Bethsaida and Chorazin was aggravated by their misimprovement of the privileges which they enjoyed under the ministry of our Lord: being exalted to Heaven in their privileges, they were cast down the deeper into Hell for their abuse of them! [Luke 10:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 10.13-15). The Jews in general too would not have had sin, comparatively, it they had not enjoyed the ministry of our blessed Lord: but that left them without excuse, [John 15:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.22). And even they will be innocent in comparison with you, if you, with the yet fuller light that is shining round you, neglect to improve the day of your visitation, [Matthew 12:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.32).

***~~2. In a way of affectionate remonstrance—~~***

It is clear and manifest, that the great mass of professing Christians do not mix faith with what they hear: for, if they did, they would obey it. Faith has the same respect to the proper objects of faith, as reason has to the proper objects of reason. From reason, we know that some things will be beneficial to the body, and other things injurious: and in accordance with its dictates we act, unless we are violently impelled in opposition to them, by some more operative principle in our minds.

Just so will faith act. If we are blinded and overpowered by sense, we are then under the influence of unbelief. And if unbelief is the predominant principle in our minds, O! think how awful will be our state!*Truly, of all sins unbelief is the least criminal in appearance—yet it is of all sins the most fatal in its end!*Persistent unbelief precludes all hope and possibility of obtaining saving mercy from God.

See its operation as marked in our text. Methinks we have here the veil of the invisible world drawn aside. We are in the habit of thinking that all go to Heaven; but here we see how few in comparison do really attain the promised rest. Of all the six hundred thousand Israelites who were advanced to manhood, two only were allowed to enter into Canaan. All the rest (with the exception of the Levites) fell short through unbelief. And this is recorded as a *warning*to us, that we buoy not up ourselves with delusive expectations, in reference to our final state! [1 Corinthians 10:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.1-6); [1 Corinthians 10:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.11), Jude verse 5. We can never alter that word, "He who believes shall be saved, and he who believes not shall be damned." I entreat you therefore to "mix faith with what you hear" from the infallible records of God's Word. Mix faith with it, I say, in the same intimate and influential manner as you mix reason with the deductions of reason. Your reason soon makes you flee from a house that is on fire, and to run to a place of safety from one that seeks your life. Just so, let your faith operate in like manner, without delay; stimulating you to flee to Christ for safety, and to lay hold upon the hope that is set before you in the Gospel!

***~~#2283~~***

***~~THE REST THAT REMAINS FOR GOD'S PEOPLE~~***

***~~[Hebrews 4:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.9)~~***

"There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God."

THE servants of God possess many distinguished privileges. Their state in this world is far happier than that of the ungodly; but there is an infinitely richer portion reserved for them hereafter! To this David had respect in that solemn denunciation, [Psalm 95:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 95.11), whence it appears, that though prefigured by other rests, it remains yet to be enjoyed.

The Apostle's argument seems to be this: God instituted a day of rest in commemoration of his having ceased from his works of creation. And many centuries afterwards he promised a rest to his people in the land of Canaan. But that rest was only *typical*of a more glorious Sabbath, of which David spoke a long time after the other had been enjoyed. From hence the Apostle concludes that there must yet be a rest, (for he changes the word which he had before used, in order more strongly to intimate the analogy between the different rests there spoken of) remaining for the people of God.

***~~I. Who are the people of God?~~***

***~~This title cannot belong to all professing Christians indiscriminately—~~***

The greater part of the world are idolatrous heathen. The generality of those who are *called*Christians are ignorant of God. Impiety and profaneness abound in every place: this indisputably proves the Apostle's assertion, [Romans 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.6). The sinful works of men plainly show whose people they are, [1 John 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.8). [John 8:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.44); nor do all who "profess godliness" really belong to God, [Romans 2:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.28-29). [Titus 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 1.16). There are many who deceive both themselves and others! [Revelation 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.1). [James 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.26).

Those alone who have a right to this eternal rest, are described by God himself in [Philippians 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.3).

***~~They "worship God in the Spirit"—~~***

It is the characteristic of God's enemies that they neglect prayer, [Psalm 53:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 53.4); nor will *formal*services prove us to be God's people, [Matthew 15:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 15.8-9). No worship is acceptable to him but that which is spiritual, [John 4:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.23-24). His faithful servants are importunate at the throne of grace, [Ephesians 6:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.18).

***~~They "rejoice in Christ Jesus"—~~***

They do not merely acknowledge him to be the Messiah. They make daily application to him as the only ground of their hopes. Their hearts are lifted up with devout affection towards him. They delight in him as their all-sufficient, Redeemer [1 Peter 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.8).

***~~They "have no confidence in the flesh"—~~***

They are deeply convinced that "in them dwells no good thing."

They see the folly of trusting to their own strength or wisdom, [Proverbs 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.5).

They acquiesce fully in Solomon's direction, [Proverbs 28:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.26).

They look for everything in Christ alone, [1 Corinthians 1:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.30).

To these belong many glorious privileges.

***~~II. What is the rest which remains for them?~~***

They have already in some respect entered into rest, [Hebrews 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.3).

They are freed from the terrors of a guilty conscience, [Hebrews 10:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.22). They feel a delight in ordinances. Their minds are fully satisfied with the Gospel salvation. They experience the truth of our Lord's promise, [Matthew 11:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.28).

But the rest which awaits them is far superior to that they now possess:

***~~They will enjoy a freedom from all labors and sorrows—~~***

They are constrained to labor as long as they are in the world. Their whole life resembles a race or warfare. They can obtain nothing without strenuous exertions, [Matthew 11:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.12); and of necessity they are encompassed with many sorrows, [Acts 14:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 14.22). But in Heaven they will cease from their labors, [Revelation 14:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 14.13); nor will their happiness have any intermission or alloy, [Revelation 21:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.4).

***~~They will be exempt from all influence of sin or temptation—~~***

*Sin now defiles their very best services!* Satan is also unwearied in his endeavors to corrupt them, [2 Corinthians 11:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.3). These are sources of much pain to them at present. But the souls of all in Heaven are made perfect, [Hebrews 12:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.23); nor can any unclean thing enter to defile them, [Revelation 21:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.27). Their triumph will be complete and ever-lasting, [Isaiah 60:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 60.20).

***~~They will dwell in the immediate presence of their God—~~***

Their capacity of enjoying God will be wonderfully enlarged: they will behold him not darkly, as now, but face to face, [1 Corinthians 13:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.12). The Savior's glory will be the object of their devoutest admiration, [John 17:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.24). Their delight in him will surpass their present conceptions, [Psalm 16:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 16.11). They shall know that their happiness will be eternal, [Revelation 22:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 22.3-5). Then will every desire of their heart be fully satisfied, [Psalm 17:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 17.15).

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How desirable is it to be numbered among God's true people!~~***

The rest described is the portion of them alone. God himself declares that the wicked have no part in it, [Isaiah 57:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.21); their portion will be very different, [Psalm 11:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 11.6), and its duration also will be endless, [Revelation 14:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 14.11).

Who then would not wish to be numbered with the saints?

Who does not desire to participate in their inheritance?

But we must first be conformed to their character. We must renounce self-confidence, and believe in Christ alone for salvation. It was unbelief which excluded the Israelites from Canaan, [Hebrews 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.18-19). Let us fear lest the same evil principle robs us of the heavenly rest, [Hebrews 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.1); [Hebrews 4:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.11).

***~~2. With what delight may God's people look forward to death!~~***

The hour of death is often an object of terror to the godly, but it should be welcomed as a season of joy.

Does not the *gardener*rejoice in his wages?

Does not the *mariner*in his haven?

Does not the *soldier*in the spoils of victory?

Much more should the Christian rejoice in the approach of his everlasting rest. Let us then long after it, like the holy Apostle, [2 Corinthians 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.2); and let us labor to attain it in full confidence of success, [2 Corinthians 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.6); 2 Corinthians 5:8-9.

***~~#2284~~***

***~~THE WORD OF GOD, LIVING AND POWERFUL~~***

***~~[Hebrews 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.12)~~***

"For the Word of God is living and powerful. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

THE state of a Christian's mind should be alike distant from slavish fear and from presumptuous confidence. He is authorized to entertain a confidence, because he has Omnipotence for his support, and the veracity of God pledged to supply him with all that is needful for his spiritual welfare. But he has need of fear also; because he is in the midst of temptations, and has a deceitful heart, ever ready to beguile him. In the view of his privileges, he may rejoice: but in the view of his dangers, he would tremble. In a word, he should, as David expresses it, "rejoice with trembling."

This frame of mind is supposed by many to be unsuited to that full liberty into which we are brought under the Christian dispensation. But Paul continually inculcates the necessity of it in order to a safe and upright walk: "Be not high-minded, but fear:" "Let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall." But in no place of Scripture is this mixture of diffidence and affiance more strongly insisted on than in this and the preceding chapters. We are taught the indispensable necessity of "holding fast the confidence, and the rejoicing of hope, firm unto the end, [Hebrews 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.6);" and yet we are again and again warned by the example of the Israelites, who were excluded from the promised land, lest we also would "fall after the same example of unbelief, verses 1, 11." It is in this view that the declarations in our text are introduced. There is an abruptness in them which renders the meaning of the Apostle somewhat difficult at first: but when the connecting link is supplied, the sense of the passage is clear, and very important. It speaks to this effect: The Israelites thought they had sufficient grounds for their unbelief; yet it ruined them. You also may be deceived by an evil heart of unbelief: but, however you may vindicate yourselves, that word, which you now disobey, will judge you in the last day; and will both expose your self-delusion, and justify God in passing against you a sentence of exclusion from the promised land.

The scope of the passage being thus explained, we propose to consider,

***~~I. The description here given of the Word of God—~~***

Many able commentators have given it as their opinion, that, by "the Word of God," we are to understand the Lord Jesus Christ, who is frequently called by that name in the Holy Scriptures. But Paul never speaks of Christ by that name: nor is there any mention of Christ in the context. On the contrary, the word of revelation is mentioned, as that which the Israelites would not believe, verse 2; as that also which excluded them from the promised rest, [Hebrews 3:7-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.7-11); and as that which speaks to us precisely as it did to them, verses 7-9. And the different things spoken of it in the text are far more suited to the written word, than to the Lord Jesus Christ. To that, therefore, we limit the description before us. Its properties are set forth:

***~~1. In figurative terms—~~***

It is a living Word. Our blessed Lord represents it in the same view: "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life, [John 6:63](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.63)." And it is the very same term which Stephen also makes use of, when he calls the Scriptures "the living oracles, [Acts 7:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.38)." The word is not a mere dead letter, that will soon vanish away: it lives in the mind of God: it lives in the decrees of Heaven: it lives and will live for ever: nor will millions of ages cause it to be forgotten, or in the least enervate its force. All besides this shall wax old, and decay: but this shall endure, without the alteration of one jot or tittle of it, to all generations, [1 Peter 1:23-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.23-25).

It is also powerful Word. Hear the appeal which God himself makes to us respecting it: "Is not my Word like as a fire? says the Lord: and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces, [Jeremiah 23:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.29)." Yes, there is nothing that can resist its force.

But in the text it is compared with "a two-edged sword," which, however sharp it may be, cannot penetrate like that. Frequently is it characterized by this image, especially as proceeding from the mouth of the Lord Jesus Christ, [Isaiah 49:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.2). [Revelation 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.16). Yet does that image give but a very faint idea of its power: for a sword, though it may inflict a mortal wound, would be utterly incapable of dividing, with accuracy, the almost imperceptible organs of the human frame: but the word can "pierce to the dividing asunder the joints and marrow; yes, and the animal soul also from the rational spirit." By this is meant, that there is nothing so hidden, which it cannot detect; nothing so blended, which it cannot discriminate.

This the Apostle proceeds to set forth,

***~~2. In plain language—~~***

The word is "a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Of the unregenerate man it is said, that "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is only evil continually [Genesis 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 6.5)." The regenerate are "renewed in the spirit of their minds." But still they are not so renewed, but that some imperfection cleaves to all which they do: there is something in every thought and every purpose of the human heart, something which still shows that man is a fallen creature, and which cannot stand the strict scrutiny of God's all-seeing eye. If he lays judgment for a line, and righteousness for a plummet, there is not anything in which there will not be found some obliquity. Such a perfect standard is the Word of God: "it will discern between the good and evil that is in the most holy thought of the most perfect of men." In the hand of "the Spirit, whose sword it is, [Ephesians 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.17)," its power is infinite, even though it be wielded by the feeblest arm. In the hand of the prophets, it "hewed" the hypocritical Jews in pieces, [Hosea 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 6.5). In the hand of the Apostles, it pierced thousands to the heart at once, [Acts 2:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.37).

In the hand of ordinary ministers, it has still the same power, and can so detect all the secret thoughts of men's hearts, as to evince that, it is indeed the very Word of God himself, [1 Corinthians 14:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 14.24-25); and through him is still, as much as ever, "mighty to the casting down of the most haughty imaginations, and to the bringing of every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, [2 Corinthians 10:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 10.4-5)."

But that which gives to this description its force, is,

***~~II. The end for which it is adduced—~~***

The Apostle means to say, that, however secret the workings of unbelief may be, they will all be detected and condemned by the word in the last day. Now,

***~~Unbelief is a most subtle sin—~~***

It has ten thousand pleas and pretexts by which it cloaks its malignity, and justifies to the mind and conscience its operations. See it in the Jews, whom it deceived to their ruin. There was always some great trial, some apparently insuperable difficulty in their way. They supposed that God would make all their way easy, and that they would have nothing to try their faith and patience. Hence they construed every difficulty as a violation of God's promises, and a prelude to his final dereliction of them. Hence also they made their appeals upon this subject with as much confidence, as if their conclusions were undeniable: and the chastisements which they received for their impiety only increased their complaints, as though, in addition to the disappointments of their legitimate expectations, they were treated with undeserved cruelty.

Thus it is with us: we hide from ourselves, or rather we *justify*to ourselves, the workings of unbelief. Its operations all seem to us to be founded in truth and equity. If we look at God's threatenings, it cannot be that they would ever be executed, because such a procedure would be inconsistent with the Divine perfections, and an act of injustice towards man. If the promises of God are the object to which our attention is turned, they are too great, and too good to be performed; or at least, that they are not intended for such sinners as we are. Besides, they are so far out of our sight, as to have, in our conceptions, little or no reality, in comparison with the objects of time and sense. Other sins we excuse as acts of frailty: but this we justify, as an act of wisdom.

***~~But, however subtle our unbelief may be, the Word of God will discover and condemn it—~~***

The Word of God is so *comprehensive*, that there is not in the whole creation a thought or purpose that does not come within its range, [Psalm 119:96](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.96); and it is so *minute*, that there is not the slightest "imagination of a thought," of which it does not take cognizance.

The Word of God is is *spiritual*, even as the Author of it himself is spiritual; and, when it is brought home with power to the soul, it convinces a man of sins of which he had before not the least conception, [Romans 7:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.9); [Romans 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.14). As by a chemical process the constituent parts of material bodies may be discovered, so by the application of the word to our souls in the last day will every thought be decompounded, as it were, and its every particle of good or evil be disclosed, [John 12:48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.48). The fire that will try us will search the inmost recesses of the soul, and determine, with infallible precision, the quality of the most latent imagination there, [1 Corinthians 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.13). Of this we have a pledge in the events which happened to the Jews in consequence of their unbelief.

Thus God addresses them by the Prophet Zechariah: "Do not be like your forefathers, to whom the earlier prophets proclaimed: This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Turn from your evil ways and your evil practices.' But they would not listen or pay attention to me, declares the LORD. Where are your forefathers now? And the prophets, do they live forever? But did not my words and my decrees, which I commanded my servants the prophets, overtake your forefathers? "Then they repented and said, 'The LORD Almighty has done to us what our ways and practices deserve, just as he determined to do." [Zechariah 1:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 1.4-6)."

And the very same confession will, assuredly, be made in the last day by the most confident unbeliever in the universe: "His sin shall surely find him out, [Numbers 32:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 32.23);" and it shall then be seen, "whose word shall stand, God's or his, [Jeremiah 44:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 44.28)." The counsels of every heart shall then be made manifest, 1 Corinthians 4:5;" and God be justified before the whole universe in the sentence that he shall pass, [Psalm 51:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.4) with [Romans 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.4).

***~~From hence we may see—~~***

***~~1. How attentive we should be to the Word of God—~~***

Would we but inspect it with humility and care, it would be as a looking-glass to reflect our own image, in a way that nothing else can do! [James 1:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.23-24). And, is it not madness to neglect the opportunity it affords us of learning our true character, and of ascertaining, beforehand, the sentence of our Judge?

To what purpose is it to deceive our own souls? Will that Word be altered? Will any other standard be brought forward whereby to estimate our state? Or shall we be able either to dispute its testimony, or avert its sentence? Dear brethren, remember the description given of it in our text; think how unavailing all your pleas and excuses will be, when its voice shall be raised against you: and now, before it be too late, take it as a light to search all the secret corners of your hearts! [John 3:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.19-21). [Proverbs 20:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 20.27), and to guide your feet into the way of peace.

***~~2. How fearful we should be of unbelief—~~***

As there is no grace which so honors God, as faith—so there is no sin which so dishonors him, as unbelief. Other sins, though they oppose his authority, do not deny his right to command: but unbelief questions the very existence of his truth. Hence does John so frequently speak of it, as "making God a liar, [1 John 2:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.22); [1 John 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.10)." Ah! little do the skeptic and the unbeliever think what guilt they contract: and little do they imagine what chains they are forging for their own souls!

How, I would ask, will any man get his sins forgiven? It can only be by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; and by a living faith too: for it is not a dead faith that will suffice; but such a faith as unites the soul to Christ, and derives out of his fullness all that grace, and mercy, and peace which we stand in need of.

Most awful is that declaration of God, that "all the fearful and unbelieving shall have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone; which is the second death! [Revelation 21:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.8)." Whether we believe this or not, it will prove true in the end: and the sentence, once denounced against Israel with an oath, shall again be repeated against all that abide in unbelief, "I swear in my wrath, that they shall not enter into my rest!"

***~~3. How earnestly we should pray to God for the gift of his Spirit—~~***

It is by the Spirit of God alone that we can either "be convinced of unbelief, [John 16:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.8-9)," or be enabled to exercise a living faith, [Ephesians 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.8). [Philippians 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.29). O! beg of God to give you his Spirit. Seek Him in earnest; and you shall not ask in vain, [Luke 11:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.13). It is the Spirit's office to "take of the things that are Christ's, and to show them unto you, [John 16:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.14)." It is his office to make the word effectual to your souls: for it is then only effectual, when "it comes in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, [1 Corinthians 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.4)."

Read not then, nor hear, the word in dependence on your own strength; but cry mightily to God to bring it home to your hearts "with power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance, [1 Thessalonians 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 1.5)." Then shall you experience its life-giving efficacy, and find it "the power of God to the salvation of your souls! [Romans 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.16)."

***~~#2285~~***

***~~GOD SEES OUR INMOST THOUGHTS~~***

***~~[Hebrews 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.13)~~***

"Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account."

MEN will commit those things in secret, which they would not commit, if they knew that the eye of a fellow-creature was upon them. But, if they duly considered the *omniscience*of God, they would be as watchful over their conduct in their most hidden recesses, as they now are in the noon-day. Yes, they would impose a far greater restraint on their inmost thoughts, than they now do on their outward actions. To fortify the Hebrews against apostasy, the Apostle endeavored to impress upon their minds the thought that every motion of their hearts was strictly noticed by God.

From his words we shall consider,

***~~I. The omniscience of God—~~***

"Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account." At one glance he beholds:

***~~1. All things—~~***

All that is past, however long ago, or however forgotten by us, is as fresh in his memory, as if it had been transacted this very moment, [Isaiah 41:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.22). All present things, in whatever quarter of the globe, and however hidden from mortal eyes, are visible to him, [Job 28:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 28.24); All future events, whoever they concern, even the eternal states of all that ever shall be born, are known by him with as much certainty as if they were already accomplished, [Isaiah 46:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 46.9-10). [Acts 15:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 15.8).

***~~2. All men—~~***

The actions of men are not only noticed by him, but weighed in a most perfect balance, [1 Samuel 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.3). [Job 31:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 31.4); Their words are all distinctly heard by him, and recorded before him, [Psalm 139:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 139.4). [2 Kings 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 6.12). Their very thoughts, however secret or transient they be, are also marked, and written by him in the book of his remembrance, [Ezekiel 11:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 11.5). [Genesis 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 6.5). The priests, when inspecting the sacrifices that had been flayed and cut asunder, did not so infallibly discern any blemish that might be found, either on their external part or in their inwards, as God discerns "every imagination of the thoughts of our hearts." This may be further illustrated by [Psalm 11:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 11.4-5), "The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD is on his heavenly throne. He observes the sons of men; his eyes examine them. The LORD examines the righteous, but the wicked and those who love violence his soul hates."

That we may not give our assent to this truth without being suitably affected with it, let us consider,

***~~II. The concern we have in it—~~***

The words of the text include a double interpretation.

We shall include both senses by observing,

***~~1. "We have to do with God" in every transaction of our lives—~~***

The law of God extends to the whole of our conduct: every action therefore, with every word and thought, is an act of obedience to him or of disobedience: there is not a possibility of detaching ourselves from him for an instant, so as to assert our independence in the least respect. Our minds should be constantly full of love to him; and our every purpose and desire should have respect to his glory, [1 Corinthians 10:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.31). How deeply then are we interested in approving ourselves to him! If we had merely to do with our fellow-creatures, it might suffice to have our actions right, even though there were some defect in our motives and principles; but when we have to do with the heart-searching God, we should be careful that every motion of our hearts be agreeable to his mind and will.

***~~2. We must give an account to God of all that we do, say and think—~~***

Everything we do is noticed by God, in order that it may be recompensed at the day of judgment, [Jeremiah 17:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.10). The book of his remembrance will assuredly be opened in that day [Revelation 20:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 20.12); and every action, word, and thought, during our whole lives, will have an influence on his decision. However trivial anything may be in our eyes, or even imperceptible by us, it will enhance our happiness or misery to all eternity: how anxious then should we be to walk as in God's sight! and how should we labor daily to lay up an increasing weight of glory, instead of "treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath! [2 Corinthians 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.17) with [Romans 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.5)."

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

***~~1. For the awakening of the careless—~~***

You may think, like those of old, that God does not see or regard your ways [Psalm 94:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 94.7); but, if Achan was detected and punished by God's immediate interference in this world, [Joshua 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 7.14); [Joshua 7:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 7.18); [Joshua 7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 7.25)—then how much more shall you be in the day of righteous retribution!

***~~2. For the encouragement of the sincere—~~***

If God notices the defects of his people, he both makes allowance for them, and observes also their excellencies. Compare [Psalm 103:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 103.14) with [Revelation 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.9). Nor have they so much as a good desire, which he does not mark with special approbation, [Psalm 38:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 38.9). [Malachi 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.16). [1 Kings 14:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 14.13). Let all then stir up their hearts to seek and serve him, [1 Chronicles 28:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 28.9); so, notwithstanding their defects, they shall receive his plaudit in the day of judgment, [1 Corinthians 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.5).

***~~#2286~~***

***~~ENCOURAGEMENT DERIVED FROM THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST~~***

***~~[Hebrews 4:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.15-16)~~***

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

Notwithstanding the excellency of the Christian religion, when compared with that of the Jews, there were not lacking many specious objections, which a Jew might bring against it, and which, on a wavering and ill-instructed mind, might operate with considerable force. A Jew might, with some appearance of truth, say, 'We know that our religion is from Heaven: we know that the sacrifices which we offer are of divine appointment: we see the priest actually making an atonement for us: we behold the high-priest carrying the blood of the sacrifice within the veil: and we hear him pronouncing the very blessing which God put into his mouth. You Christians lose all these advantages, and rely on mere notions of your own, which have nothing visible, nothing real.'

But to these objections the Christian may reply, 'We have a better sacrifice, and a greater High-priest than you: and though we see neither the sacrifice nor the High-priest with our bodily eyes, we know he is entered into a better tabernacle, that is, into Heaven itself, "there to appear in the presence of God for us:" and therefore do we "hold fast our profession," yes, and will hold it fast, whatever hindrances, or whatever allurements, are employed to turn us from it.'

But if the greatness of our High-priest is sufficient to determine us, what will not the consideration of his goodness be? Let us but contemplate that, and we shall need nothing further to keep us steadfast even to the end: for we shall have a perfect assurance that we shall never want anything that is requisite either for our spiritual or eternal welfare.

This is the idea suggested in the text; from whence we are naturally led to notice:

***~~I. The character of our great High-priest—~~***

Though he was "the Son of God," "Jehovah's Fellow," "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person," yet "He was in all points tempted like as we are."

In bodily sufferings, he was tried with hunger and thirst, and weariness and pain; and had not even a place to lay his head. As for persecutions from men, no human being was ever pursued with such bitter unrelenting animosity as he. No terms were too vile to be applied to him: he was called "a glutton and a drunkard," a deceiver and blasphemer, a Samaritan and a devil: and the whole nation rose against him with that indignant cry, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

Of his assaults from Satan, what shall we say? What words can express the conflicts he maintained with all the powers of darkness, in the wilderness, and in the garden of Gethsemane, when through the agonies of his soul his whole body was bathed in a bloody sweat?

From the hidings of his Father's face also, and from a sense of his wrath, when, as we are told, "it pleased the Lord to bruise him," his sufferings infinitely surpassed all that any created imagination can conceive. When his soul was sore troubled, even unto death, he prayed indeed for the removal of the bitter cup—yet drank it, when put into his hands, without complaint: but when he was called to endure the consummation of his misery in the hidings of his Father's face, he could not forbear pouring forth that heart-rending complaint, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Thus was he foremost in almost every trial that we can possibly be called upon to sustain; and notwithstanding in him was no sin, he was, far beyond any of the sinners of mankind, "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief."

***~~Having experienced in his own person all that we can feel, he sympathizes with us in all our trials—~~***

The double negation in our text is very expressive; and imports much more than a simple affirmation. Our High-priest is most assuredly a tender sympathizing Friend: and one great end for which he submitted to be tempted like us, was, that he might learn to appreciate aright our sufferings, and "be able to support us in our temptations, [Hebrews 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.18)." He now can say, more emphatically than heretofore, "I know their sorrows! [Exodus 3:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 3.7);" and more justly may it be said of him, "His soul is grieved for the misery of Israel, [Judges 10:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 10.16)." So acutely does he feel for all his members, that "whoever persecutes them, persecutes him, [Acts 9:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.4);" and "whoever touches one of them, touches the apple of his eye, [Zechariah 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 2.8)." What he felt when he wept at the grave of Lazarus, he still feels, as it were, when he beholds his sorrowing and afflicted people. From whatever quarter their troubles arise, from men or devils, from body or from mind, yes, or even from the hand of God himself, his compassion is the same, and his sympathy is ready to exert itself for their relief.

Such being indisputably the character of our High-priest, let us contemplate,

***~~II. The encouragement to be derived from it in all our addresses at the throne of grace—~~***

The thought of having such a high-priest passed into the heavens to further our cause in the presence of his God, emboldens us to come to God himself:

***~~1. Without fear, as arising from a sense of our own unworthiness—~~***

Had we not such an Advocate, it would be impossible for us to draw near to God with any hope of acceptance. To such unholy creatures as we, God would be nothing but "a consuming fire." But, when we recollect what a sacrifice our great High-priest has offered, and that "he is entered into Heaven with his own blood," and that he pleads the merit of that blood in behalf of his believing people, how can we doubt of acceptance through his prevailing intercession? Be it so, that our sins have been most heinous: yet are we assured, that "his blood will cleanse from all sin," and that those who are washed in it, shall be as wool, and their crimson sins be white as snow. Had we the guilt of the whole world accumulated on our own souls, still need we not despair, since he who is our Advocate is also "an atoning sacrifice for us, and not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the world, [1 John 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.2)." If the blood of bulls and goats prevailed for Israel to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who, through the Eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God, purge our conscience from dead works to serve the living God, [Hebrews 9:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.13-14). With such an Advocate we have nothing to fear. We are sure that " the Father hears him always:" and that "he is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him, seeing he ever lives to make intercession for them! [Hebrews 7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.25)." He has the names of all his people on his breast-plate, and on his heart: and the chief of sinners may be as confident of acceptance through him, as those who have comparatively little to be forgiven, [1 Timothy 1:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.15-16).

***~~2. Without doubt, as arising from the greatness of the things we have to ask—~~***

All that we can need is comprehended in two things, "mercy and grace;" the one, for the pardon of our past transgressions; the other, for the preservation of our souls from sin in the future. Now these are the very things specified in our text, as to be asked by us in the name of our High-priest with boldness and confidence: and we are assured, that they shall be granted, both in the time and measure that we need them. We are not to be accounting anything too great to ask, because there is nothing too great for him to give. We "are not to be straitened in ourselves, seeing that we are not straitened in him." We may "ask what we will; and it shall be done unto us, [John 14:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.13-14)." However "wide we open our mouth, it shall be filled, [Psalm 81:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.10)." Let our need of mercy be ever so great, "we shall obtain mercy;" and our need of grace ever so abundant, the supply shall be proportioned to our need. If we need *grace*to sustain suffering, to fulfill duty, to transform the soul into the Divine image, "Ask and have," is the Divine command: and our boldness in asking cannot be too great, provided it be of a right kind: it must not be of an unhallowed and presumptuous cast; but duly tempered with penitential sorrow, and patient resignation. Then it may rise to a confident expectation, and a full assurance of faith, [Hebrews 10:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.19-22).

***~~But while we are thus encouraged to draw near to God, let us learn,~~***

***~~1. That nothing is to be obtained without prayer—~~***

It is not the death of Christ as our sacrifice, nor the intercession of Christ as our great High-priest, that will save us—if we do not pray for ourselves. Though he is on a throne, and that throne is a "throne of grace," we shall receive no benefit from his power or grace, if we do not sue for it in earnest and believing prayer. His offices are not intended to supersede our endeavors, but to encourage them, and to assure us of success in the use of the appointed means. Those are always characterized as "enemies, who call not upon God:" and we are warned plainly that we cannot *have*, if we neglect to *ask*, [James 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.3). The means must be used in order to the end; and it is only in, and by, the means, that the end can ever be attained, [Matthew 7:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.7-8). Hear this, you who neglect prayer, or draw near to God with your lips only and not with your hearts! Unless "in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, you make your requests known unto God," you can never experience his blessing upon your souls, nor ever behold the face of your God in peace.

***~~2. That in all your addresses to God your eyes must be directly fixed on the Lord Jesus Christ as your Mediator and Advocate—~~***

When the high-priest was passing through the veil into the holy of holies, the eyes of all were fixed on him as their mediator; and from his intercession all their hopes were derived. And how much more should our eyes be fixed on the Lord Jesus Christ as our Advocate and Intercessor! It is in his name that we are taught to offer our supplications, [John 16:23-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.23-26); and it is through his intercession alone that they can come up with acceptance before God, [John 16:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.6). Seek then at all times to realize this in your minds: and beg of God to make you deeply and abidingly sensible of it: for "then only do you honor the Father, when you thus honor his dear Son, [John 5:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.23);" and then only will the Father be glorified in you, when he is thus honored and glorified in the person of his Son, [John 14:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.12).

***~~3. That when you thus approach God in and through his Son, all doubts of acceptance must be put away—~~***

We are not to be wavering in our minds when we draw near to God. To doubt either his power or his willingness to help us, is to disparage both the Father and the Son: and prayers offered with a doubtful mind will never bring with them an answer of peace, [James 1:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.6-7). It is quite a mistaken humility that leads persons to question whether such sinners as they are, can find mercy; or whether the grace of Christ can be sufficient for them. All such doubts betray an ignorance of Christ and his Gospel. If he is not the Son of God, equal with the Father, then we may well doubt his ability to help: or if his sacrifice and intercession is not the appointed means of salvation for the whole world, then we may ask, Can he save such a guilty wretch as me? But if all has been ordered of the Father, and the whole work of redemption has been executed by the Son, then must we "not stagger at any of the promises, but be strong in faith, giving glory to God, [Romans 4:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.20)." And according to our faith, so shall it be done unto us.

***~~3. That while we derive such comfort from him, we would labor to imitate his example—~~***

He suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should "follow in his steps." He requires us to "love one another, as he has loved us;" and, if need be, to "lay down our lives for the brethren." And is there not a call for our sympathy at this time? Let us then show that we "possess the mind that was in Christ Jesus," and labor to the uttermost to extend to our brethren such aid as shall be suitable and sufficient for them.

***~~#2287~~***

***~~CHRIST BENEFITTED BY HIS OWN SUFFERINGS~~***

***~~[Hebrews 5:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.7-9)~~***

"During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him."

THE priestly office, as marked out by God, belonged exclusively to the tribe of Levi. Yet our Lord, though he was not of that tribe to which the priesthood appertained, was truly and properly a High-priest. He was constituted a priest of a different order from that of Aaron, and executed the duties of the priesthood in a far different manner than it was possible for any other person to perform them. He offered not the blood of bulls and of goats, but his own body, for the sins of the world. The Apostle describing the manner in which he ministered, sets before us:

***~~I. His conduct under his sufferings—~~***

***~~Never were the sufferings of any creature comparable with those of Christ—~~***

His *bodily*sufferings perhaps were less than many of his followers have been called to endure. But those of his *soul*were infinitely beyond our conceptions, [Psalm 22:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 22.14-15) with [Matthew 26:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.38); the assaults of Satan, and the wrath of God, combined to produce that bloody sweat in the garden of Gethsemane, [Luke 22:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.44).

***~~Under them he poured out his heart in prayer unto his heavenly Father—~~***

He never lost sight of God as his Father, but addressed him with the greater earnestness under that endearing title, [Mark 14:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 14.36); he knew that his Father was "able to save him from death:" he therefore repeatedly besought him to remove the bitter cup, and urged his petitions "with strong cries and floods of tears;" not that he repented of the work he had undertaken; but only desired such a mitigation of his sufferings as might consist with his Father's glory, and the salvation of men, [John 12:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.27-28). As a man, he could not but feel, and as a good man, he could not but deprecate, the wrath of God: but he desired nothing that was inconsistent with the Divine will, [Matthew 26:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.39).

Nor did he desist from prayer until he had obtained his request—

Him the Father always heard, nor was an answer now denied to him: he was delivered from that which he chiefly deprecated. Though the cup was not removed, he was not allowed to faint in drinking it: he was *strengthened*by an angel in answer to his prayer, [Luke 22:43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.43), and clearly showed what an answer he had received, by the dignified composure with which he immediately resigned himself into the hands of his enemies, [John 18:4-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 18.4-8); [John 18:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 18.11).

His sufferings indeed could not be dispensed with; but they were amply recompensed by,

***~~II. The benefit he derived from them—~~***

The benefits accruing to our Lord from his own sufferings were:

***~~1. Personal—~~***

It was necessary for him as our High-priest to experience everything which his people are called to endure in their conflicts with sin and Satan, [Hebrews 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.17). Now the difficulty of abiding faithful to God in arduous circumstances is exceeding great: this is a trial which all his people are called to sustain, and under it they more particularly need his almighty support; this therefore he submitted to learn. Though as the Son of God he knew all things in a speculative manner—yet he could not know this *experimentally*, but by being reduced to a suffering condition; this therefore was one benefit which he derived from his sufferings. He learned by them more tenderly to sympathize with his afflicted people, and more speedily to support them when imploring his help with strong crying and tears, [Hebrews 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.18).

***~~2. Official—~~***

As the priests were consecrated to their office by the blood of their sacrifices, so was Jesus consecrated by his own blood, see [Hebrews 7:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.28). From that time he had a right to impart salvation: from that time also he exercised that right. The persons indeed to whom alone he is "the author of eternal salvation," are "those who obey him." Not that they possess this qualification before he vouchsafes his mercy to them; but he invariably transforms his people into his own image, and makes them, like himself, obedient unto death, [Philippians 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.8).

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

***~~1. What we should do under sufferings, or a dread of God's displeasure—~~***

We should not hastily conclude that we are not his children, [Hebrews 12:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.6); we should rather go with humble boldness to God as our Father, [Luke 15:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 15.17-18); we should plead his gracious promises, [Psalm 50:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 50.15); nor can we possibly be too earnest, provided we be content that his will would be done. (Alas! that there would be so little resemblance between our prayers and those of Christ!) We should however consider that as the best answer to prayer, which most enables us to glorify God.

***~~2. Where to go for salvation—~~***

The Father was "able to save his Son from death," and doubtless he can save us also; but he has exalted his Son to be a Prince and a Savior, [Acts 5:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.31). To Christ therefore we are to go, and to the Father through Christ [Ephesians 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.18). In this way we shall find him to be the author of eternal salvation to us, [Hebrews 7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.25).

***~~3. What is to be our conduct when he has saved us—~~***

Jesus died "to purchase to himself a peculiar people zealous for good works." We must therefore obey him, and that too as willingly in seasons of severe trial as in times of peace: we must be content to be conformed to the likeness of our Lord and Master. Let us be faithful unto death, and he will give us a crown of life, [Revelation 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.10).

***~~#2288~~***

***~~THE SLOW PROGRESS OF MANY REPROVED~~***

***~~[Hebrews 5:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.11-14)~~***

"We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil."

THERE is in the Holy Scriptures a great diversity of truths suited to the various states and capacities of men. There are some so plain and simple, that "he who runs may read" and understand them: there are others so deep and mysterious, that persons of the strongest intellect and most extensive erudition are utterly lost in the contemplation of them.

In human sciences, men of genius and penetration have a great advantage over those of a less cultivated and comprehensive mind; because the strength of their faculties enables them to prosecute their researches to a far greater extent than the others can.

*But in divine knowledge, it is not the most learned, but the most humble and heavenly-minded person, who will make the greatest progress.* Ignorance in divine things (especially among those who enjoy a faithful ministry of the Gospel) springs from willful remissness, rather than from any lack of capacity; and involves the offender in very deep guilt. It is on this ground that the Apostle reproves the Hebrews for their inability to receive what he had to say respecting Melchizedek and Christ. He represents their infantile state as the consequence of their own sloth, and as an occasion of considerable embarrassment to himself, since he knew not how to open to them the sublimer truths of Christianity, because they were yet so ill-instructed in its very first principles.

In explaining the drift of his address we shall:

***~~I. Inquire whence it is that men's progress in divine knowledge is so disproportioned to the advantages they enjoy—~~***

***~~That many who hear the Gospel are but little profited by it, is a melancholy and undeniable fact—~~***

*That persons would continue ignorant when little else than heathen morality is set before them, cannot be wondered at.* But many, who for a course of years have had "Christ crucified set before them," and have from time to time been addressed with the greatest plainness and fidelity—yet are surprisingly dark in their views of the Gospel.

They think they understand the plan of salvation; and yet they confound things the most distinct. They mix faith and works, either uniting them as joint grounds of our salvation, or making their works a warrant to believe, and disjoin things the most inseparable.

They cannot conceive how the exercises of their own free-will must, as far as they are good, be ascribed to the agency of the Holy Spirit, while, as far as they are evil, they are not to be considered as the emanations of their own wicked hearts in concurrence with the agency of Satan.

But, when their notions are ever so clear and accurate, they still remain without any *experimental*acquaintance with the truths of God. They are "unskillful in the word of righteousness." Whatever they profess to believe respecting the depravity of the heart, and "a life of faith upon the Son of God," they have not an experience of it in their own souls; so that they still need as much as ever to have "the first principles of the oracles of God" inculcated and enforced. "Considering the time" that they have been learning, "they ought to have been long since qualified to teach others;" and yet "have they need to be taught the very same things again" and again. They still need as much as ever to have "line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little."

***~~The reason for this must be sought for in their own negligence—~~***

If this lack of proficiency had existed only since the days of the Apostles, we might have ascribed it to the weakness and insufficiency of the teachers: nor are we disposed entirely to exclude that as a concurrent cause of the slow progress that is made among us. But the same complaints which we make, were uttered by the Apostles; and the lack of proficiency in their hearers is imputed to their "dullness in hearing," and slothfulness in improving what they heard. You are ready enough to hear; and perhaps, like Ezekiel's hearers, are pleased with the sound of the Gospel, as you would be with some delightful music, [Ezekiel 33:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.32); but are you careful to *apply*to yourselves what you hear?

Do you examine yourselves by it?

Do you labor to treasure it up in your hearts?

Do you pray over it?

Do you make it the subject of your conduct with your families, and of your meditations in the hours of retirement?

Do you not, on the contrary, find, that, through your neglecting to harrow in the seed, "the birds of the air come and take it away;" or that, "through the cares and pleasures of this world, it is so choked that it never grows up to perfection?

Yes, this is the reason of that slow progress which people make in divine knowledge. This is the reason that persons, who would account themselves idiots if they received so little benefit from instructions in any other branch of knowledge, continue mere "babes" throughout their whole lives.

Having found the reason of men's unprofitableness under the ministry of the Gospel, we proceed to,

***~~II. Show the sad consequences arising from it—~~***

The misimprovement of this talent is greatly overlooked among the sins we commit, or the evils we deplore. But,

***~~1. It incapacitates men for receiving instructions—~~***

"Babes" must have food suited to their age: if "strong meat" were administered to them, they could not receive it: instead of being profited by the deeper mysteries of the Gospel, or by a full exhibition of the divine life as it exists and operates in the hearts of more advanced Christians, they would very probably be injured: the display of light would be too bright for their organs; or, to use the metaphor in the text, the meat would be too strong for their digestive faculties.

What a loss then is this to the persons themselves! What a loss too to many who would be greatly benefitted by the stronger food, but who must have only milk presented to them, lest others, unable to partake of their repast, would be deprived of what is absolutely necessary for their subsistence!

Let this be duly considered; and it will surely prove an effectual incentive to diligence!

***~~2. It imposes a restraint on their instructors—~~***

"We have many things to say, and hard to be uttered:" not that the difficulty lies in expressing them: but in reducing them to the comprehension of persons who are so "dull of hearing." When we speak to "those who are of full age," we can enter largely into every part of the Gospel; because "they, having their spiritual senses exercised by use and habit, can discern both good and evil." They have a clear perception of the things we say, just as a man has of things bitter or sweet. We need not be laboring always to prove that such or such things are bitter or sweet; because they see in an instant the true and proper quality of the things that are set before them: they understand the analogy of faith; and are prepared to follow us as far as God enables us to lead them.

But, however delightful such deep researches might be, we dare not, except in a very sparing manner, prosecute them. We are forced to use the same caution as Christ did towards his hearers [John 16:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.12); and as Paul did in addressing the Church at Corinth: "I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual; but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto you were not able to bear it; neither yet now are you able, [1 Corinthians 3:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.1-2)."

And is not this a sad effect of men's "dullness?" Is it not an injury to us, as well as unto them? Would not our own ability in ministering be increased, if we were more at liberty to search into "the deep things of God" for their instruction? And would not the growth of all be more speedily advanced?

Let this then be an additional motive for diligence. When you see how extensive and lamentable are the consequences of supineness, learn, in pity to yourselves and to the whole Church of God, to press forward with increasing earnestness and zeal.

***~~Advice—~~***

***~~1. Let us improve to the uttermost the advantages we enjoy—~~***

God notices how long, and how often, we have the means of grace afforded us; and he will call us to an account for them as talents committed to our charge. And if the Gospel we hear is not "a savor of life unto life, it will be a savor of death unto death, [2 Corinthians 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.16)." The opportunities of improvement which the Jews had under the ministry of our Lord, rendered their guilt and punishment more aggravated than that of Sodom and Gomorrah! [Matthew 11:20-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.20-24) with 12:41, 42. May the Lord grant that such may never be the effects of our ministry on you!

***~~2. Let us not be satisfied with low attainments—~~***

It is doubtless a mercy to be "babes in Christ," if we are really such. But what parent in the universe, however pleased with the birth of a child, would take pleasure in it, if, instead of growing towards manhood, it always retained its infantile weakness and stature? Can God then behold with delight such a monster in his family? Does he not expect that, from "children we become young men, and from young men we advance to be fathers in his Church [John 2:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.12-14)." Let us then have our "spiritual senses exercised:" let us endeavor to have them matured "by use and habit;" let us get a nice "discernment of good and evil." Let us "desire the sincere milk of the word," not merely that we may be satisfied with it, but that we may grow thereby, [1 Peter 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.2), and be qualified for the reception of stronger food. "In malice," or any other kind of evil, "be children; but in understanding be men, [1 Corinthians 14:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 14.20)."

***~~3. Let us make a good use of the attainments we already possess—~~***

They who themselves "need to be taught the first principles of the oracles of God," have no pretensions to set up themselves as teachers of others: and it is much to be lamented that such teachers would ever be admitted into the Church of God; or, when admitted, be allowed to retain their office. But all who are taught of God, "ought" to exert themselves in teaching others. We say not, that all are to become preachers of the word: but we say, that all would endeavor to instruct their friends, and their neighbors, and more especially their children and dependents, [Romans 15:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 15.14). [Hebrews 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.13). In laboring thus to do good, they would get good; and "in watering others, they would themselves be watered" with the dews of Heaven [Proverbs 11:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 11.25).

***~~#2289~~***

***~~GOING ON CHRISTIAN MATURITY~~***

***~~[Hebrews 6:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.1-3)~~***

"Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And God permitting, we will do so."

IN arts and sciences of every kind, the greatest proficients feel a need of improvement: their very advancement only serves to show them how little they know, and to increase their zeal in the pursuit of higher attainments. But in religion, everyone thinks he knows enough, and is content with the progress he has already made. What we learned in our early youth serves, for the most part, as a sufficient stock to carry us on through life; and the habits which we have acquired in our place and station satisfy our minds, so that we are ready to ask, "What more do I lack?" But surely this is not right. If, as the Apostle John informs us, there are diversities of age and stature in the Christian life, and in the Church there are little children, young men, and fathers, it*surely does not befit us to remain all our days in a state of infantile weakness and ignorance, as if that were the full measure that God had authorized us to expect*.

Peter expressly tells us, that we should "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." And in the preceding context, the Apostle complains of his Hebrew converts, that "whereas, from the time since their conversion, they should have been qualified for teachers, they had need to be taught again the very first principles of the oracles of God; and were become such, as still had need of milk, rather than of strong meat, [Hebrews 5:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.12)." But, as there were some of them who were no longer "babes, but had attained to full age, and by reason of use had their senses exercised to discern both good and evil," he should, for their instruction, "leave," as it were unnoticed, "the first principles" of the Gospel, and, by a fuller statement of its mysteries, "lead them on unto maturity, [Hebrews 5:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.13-14) with the text." Now, "this will we also do, if God permits." My endeavor at this time shall be to show,

***~~I. What those principles are, the development of which we shall at present wave—~~***

***~~The first of these is, "Repentance from dead works"—~~***

This is so plain a duty, that no one who has ever heard the Gospel can entertain a doubt respecting it. Sin of every kind must be mourned over, as deserving of death; and must be utterly forsaken, as an object of our most sincere abhorrence.

***~~The second is, "Faith towards God"—~~***

This also is required, as indispensably necessary to salvation. Not only must we "believe that God is, and is a rewarder of all who diligently seek him;" but we must believe that he is reconciled to man through the Son of his love; and that "of those who come to him in his Son's name, he will never cast out one." This is God's promise in the Gospel: and we must believe "Him faithful who has promised."

The two which are next specified, namely,**"Baptisms, and the laying on of hands,"**are not additional principles; but rites of the Jewish law, by which the two foregoing principles were prefigured—

Commentators have tried to explain these two as additional principles; and have represented the "baptisms" as signifying the baptisms of John and of Christ; and "the laying on of hands," as referring to the imposition of the Apostles' hands on men, for the purpose of communicating to them the gifts of the Holy Spirit, or of ordaining them to the blessed office of the ministry. But they are no principles; nor would we attempt to explain them as such. They are explanatory of the preceding words. By "baptisms," we understand the "divers washings" which were observed under the law, [Hebrews 9:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.10); which shadowed forth a cleansing from sin and dead works by repentance, or, as the Apostle expresses it, "the washing of regeneration." And by "laying on of hands," we understand the offerers of sacrifices laying their hands upon the head of their victim, in order to transfer to it their guilt, and express their hope of acceptance through it, [Leviticus 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.4); [Leviticus 4:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.15); [Leviticus 4:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.24); [Leviticus 4:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.33); [Leviticus 16:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 16.21). It was in this way that they exercised their "faith towards God."

Now, then, put these two into a parenthesis, as being only illustrative and explanatory of the former two, and all the difficulties, in which commentators have involved the passage, will vanish.

***~~The third principle is, "the Resurrection of the dead "—~~***

This, also, is an essential part of "the doctrine of Christ." It was indeed, though not very fully, revealed under the law: but under the Gospel it is declared with the utmost possible clearness and certainty; so that it may well be said, that "life and immortality are brought to light by the Gospel, 2 Timothy 1:10." The resurrection of our blessed Lord is indeed the one foundation of all our hopes: and it has assured to us, beyond a possibility of doubt our own resurrection; seeing that Christ was the first-fruits" of the harvest that shall in due season be gathered in, [1 Corinthians 15:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.20).

***~~The last is, "Eternal judgment"—~~***

Temporal rewards and punishments were chiefly insisted on under the law; but under the Gospel, we are taught to look forward to a day of future retribution, when "God will judge the world by that blessed Jesus, whom he has ordained" to that office; and will separate the wicked from the just; consigning the one to everlasting misery, and exalting the other to everlasting blessedness and glory! [Matthew 25:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.32); [Matthew 25:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.40).

***~~The consideration of these principles we shall at the present wave—~~***

The importance of them cannot be doubted: for the Apostle speaks of them as a "foundation which he had laid." And every minister must inculcate them, with all possible earnestness. In truth, unless his mind be continually under the influence of these principles, a man has not the smallest right to call himself a Christian. *He may have been baptized; but he is no other than a baptized heathen, that has no part or lot in the Gospel salvation*.

Having, times without number, enforced these things on your attention, I now pass them over; and proceed to the more immediate object of my discourse; which is, to show,

***~~II. What are those sublimer views which it is our high privilege to contemplate—~~***

Of course, we cannot in one discourse enter at all fully into this subject: we can only give some faint outline of it; some hints, which may afford matter for your further meditation in secret.

By "going on unto maturity," the Apostle meant that he would unfold to them the deeper mysteries of the Gospel, which it was of great importance to them to comprehend. These mysteries he unfolds in all the remaining part of this epistle. We shall comprehend them under two heads:

***~~1. The "perfection" of Christ's priestly office—~~***

The priesthood under the Mosaic dispensation was confined to the tribe of Levi. Of this our blessed Lord could not partake, because he was of the tribe of Judah. But a new order of priesthood was to arise, after the order of Melchizedek: and this was the priesthood to which Jesus was called. In all its offices it resembled the Levitical priesthood; by which it was, in fact, shadowed forth, in all its parts.

Our blessed Lord, as our great High-priest, offered himself a sacrifice to God. He was to expiate the sins of mankind. Not all the cattle on a thousand hills were sufficient for that. But "a body was prepared for him" for that end; a body "like, indeed, unto sinful flesh," but altogether "without sin." This body he offered upon the cross; as the Apostle says, "He offered himself without spot to God." In reference to this, the Baptist pointed him out as "The Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world:" and even in Heaven he appears "as a Lamb that has been slain," and receives the adorations of all his redeemed people, on a perfect equality with the Father: "they sing, day and night, salvation to our God, who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever!"

The high-priest, having offered the sacrifice, carried its blood within the veil, and there sprinkled it on the mercy-seat, and before the mercy-seat.

Now, our blessed Lord was both the Sacrifice and the Priest who offered it: and having offered his own blood as an atonement upon the cross, he rose from the dead, and "entered with his own blood into the Heaven of heavens," there to present it unto God in our behalf, [Hebrews 9:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.12). With that blood he sprinkles, as it were, the mercy-seat of the Most High; and God the Father, beholding it, is pacified towards us; or, as Paul expresses it, "He is reconciled towards us by the blood of the cross, [Colossians 1:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.20-22)."

While within the veil, the high-priest covered the mercy-seat with clouds of incense: and this also our blessed Savior does, by his continual intercession. "He appears in the presence of God for us," as our all-prevailing Advocate and Intercessor: and by his intercessions, founded on the merit of his own sacrifice, he obtains for us all those supplies of grace and peace which our daily necessities require: for "Him the Father hears always."

Having fulfilled these offices within the veil, the high-priest came forth, clad in all his splendid garments, to bless the people. And so will our great High-priest come forth, in his own glory, and in all the glory of his Father, to complete the blessedness of his redeemed people. To all of them he will say, "Come, you who are blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world!"

***~~2. The "perfection" of our privileges, as secured by it—~~***

This also the Apostle unfolds, though, alas! we have only time to specify one or two particulars. But through our great High-priest we receive a full and perfect and everlasting remission of all our sins. The forgiveness obtained by the Levitical sacrifices was only temporary. The very services by which it was obtained were only "a remembrance of sins" still unforgiven. But, "through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ, we are sanctified once for all;" yes, "by one offering he has perfected for ever those who are sanctified, [Hebrews 9:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.13-14); [Hebrews 10:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.10); [Hebrews 10:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.14)." God himself engages, by covenant, and by oath, that "our sins and iniquities he will remember no more, [Hebrews 10:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.17), compared with [Hebrews 8:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.10); [Hebrews 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.12)."

Through him, too, we are admitted into the immediate presence of our God. Not a soul was admitted into the holy of holies, except the high-priest; nor he, except on one day in the year. But "into the holiest of all have we access by the blood of Jesus, by that new and living way which he has consecrated for us through the veil: and having him as our High-priest over the house of God, the Apostle says, "Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, [Hebrews 10:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.19-22)." There is not a sinner in the universe who may not thus come to the very mercy-seat of our God, where he shines forth in all his glory, provided only he comes in the name of Jesus, and pleading the merit of the Redeemer's blood.

The highest possible elevation, too, of which our nature is capable, is given unto us through the intervention of our great High-priest. We are every one of us made both kings and priests: for in Christ Jesus there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female: all are on a level in this respect: all are partakers of the same privileges: all are now "a royal priesthood, [1 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.9);" and all shall before long join in that triumphant song, "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 his 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)."

***~~What now shall I say, as an improvement of this subject? I will say,~~***

***~~1. Press forward for higher attainments in knowledge—~~***

Do not imagine that you know enough of the Gospel: there are in it unfathomable depths which even the angels in Heaven are continually "desiring to look into." See what was Paul's prayer in behalf of the saints at Ephesus, whom he speaks of as eminent for their "faith in the Lord Jesus, and their love to all the saints:" "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. 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, [Ephesians 1:15-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.15-20)." Let this be your prayer for yourselves, my beloved brethren, however advanced you are in faith and love. In truth, it is by your increase in knowledge that you are to increase in grace: for it is by your "comprehending with augmented clearness the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, by comprehending this, I say, you are to be filled with all the fullness of God, [Ephesians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.18-19)."

***~~2. Press forward for higher attainments in holiness—~~***

"This I wish, brethren, even your perfection, [2 Corinthians 13:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 13.9)." Rest not satisfied with anything short of a perfect transformation into "the Divine image, in righteousness and true holiness." Make this the ultimate object of your knowledge; and employ your knowledge for the production of it. Paul's prayer for his brethren at Colosse will serve you as a model for your prayers, and as a standard for your endeavors: "Since the day we heard about you, 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, [Colossians 1:9-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.9-12)."

You will scarcely think yourselves so advanced as the Apostle Paul: yet what does he say of himself? "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 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, [Philippians 3:12-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.12-15)."

I charge you, brethren, to indulge no listless habits, no self-complacent thoughts. Take this holy Apostle for your example: "Let your conduct be in Heaven, where your Lord and Savior has gone before, [Philippians 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.17); [Philippians 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.20);" and rest not until you are changed into his image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of your God! [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.18).

***~~#2290~~***

***~~THE DANGER OF APOSTASY~~***

***~~[Hebrews 6:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.4-6)~~***

"It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace."

***~~IT is of great importance in interpreting the Scriptures, to lay aside theological systems, and to attend carefully to the connection of any passage with the context; because a just view of the general scope of the passage will throw the best light upon any particular expressions contained in it.~~***

The words before us are confessedly difficult to be understood: but, if we adopt the mode of interpretation now proposed, we shall not err very materially in our explanation of their import. The Apostle has been reproving the Hebrews for the little progress which they had made in the divine life, considering the length of time since they were first initiated into the knowledge of the Gospel. He complains that, on account of their inability to comprehend him, he scarcely knows how to open to them the deeper mysteries of our religion, [Hebrews 5:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.11-14); which however he must do, for the benefit of those who could digest strong meat, and make a due improvement of the truths he would set before them, [Hebrews 6:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.1-3).

In the meantime, he warns them that *the neglecting to advance in religion is the surest road to apostasy*; and that apostasy, after such attainments as they had made, would in all *human*probability outcome in their eternal ruin, verse 4-6.

Then, illustrating that point by an apt simile, verse 7, 8, he proceeds to exhort them to put away sloth, and with all diligence to follow those who through faith and patience were now inheriting their promised reward, verse 11, 12.

Hence it appears that the attainments mentioned in the text are such as were found in persons recently converted and of doubtful character; especially because they are contrasted with other attainments which accompany and manifest a state of salvation, verse 9, 10.

In our further illustration of the text, we shall show:

***~~I. How far men may go in religion, and yet apostatize from it—~~***

Confining ourselves to the words before us, we observe:

***~~That unstable persons may possess many enviable gifts—~~***

Their minds may be "enlightened" with the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus. Compare [Numbers 24:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 24.3-4) with [Hebrews 10:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.26). *There is not anything which the most eminent saint can know, but it may be known by a hypocrite: the difference between them is not in the matter known, but in the manner of knowing it; the one assenting to it with his head; and the other feeling it in his heart.*

Their hearts may be moved by hearing and reading "the Word of God," and by considering the mysteries of the Christian dispensation, or the realities of "the invisible world. "The world to come" may be taken in either of these senses. See [Hebrews 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.5)." Their hope, fear, joy, and sorrow may be called forth successively in a very powerful manner, according as they apprehend themselves to be savingly interested in the promises of the Gospel, or liable to its threatenings, [Ezekiel 33:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.31-32). [Matthew 13:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.20-21). [John 5:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.35). [Mark 6:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 6.20). [Acts 24:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 24.25).

Their powers may be enlarged, as well for the discharging of duties which their unassisted nature would be unequal to perform, as for the working of miracles, to which no created power is competent. By "the heavenly gift," or the gracious operations of the Holy Spirit, they may make some considerable advances in the divine life, [2 Peter 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.20); and through his miraculous agency, "of which they may also be partakers," they may do wonders that shall astonish all who behold them, [Matthew 7:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.22) with [1 Corinthians 12:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 12.11).

It is observable, however, that the Apostle expresses himself in terms calculated to convey rather a low idea of the attainments of these persons: he speaks of their "*tasting*of the heavenly gift," and "*tasting*of the good Word of God;" designedly intimating thereby, that they never lived upon the word as the food of their souls, or made true religion their great solace and support, but contented themselves with a slight, transient, and superficial taste of both.

***~~Such persons may certainly become apostates from the truth—~~***

That they may "fall away" from the practice of religion, is evident from the instances of David and others, who, after a long experience of "the power of godliness," have grievously departed from the path of duty. But they may also apostatize from even the profession of the truth. How many are there who "for awhile believe, and, in a time of temptation, fall away? [Luke 8:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 8.13)." The instance of Demas, [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), if there were no other, is very sufficient to prove, that men may possess, not only *gifts*, but *graces*too—and yet "return with the dog to his vomit," and "draw back unto perdition, [2 Peter 2:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.22). [Hebrews 10:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.38-39)."

Miserable, indeed, will their situation then become, on account of,

***~~II. The extreme difficulty of renewing them again unto repentance—~~***

***~~To "renew them to repentance," is a great and arduous work—~~***

If repentance were no more than a slight conviction of their folly in renouncing the truth—then we might hope that a very little experience of the fatal change would bring them to it. But it implies a total renovation both of the heart and life: which is a work at all times difficult; but peculiarly so under their circumstances. It is said to be "impossible;" by which we are to understand, not that it is an absolute, but only a *moral*, impossibility. When our Lord declared that it was "easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of Heaven," he explained himself by saying, "With man this is impossible; but with God all things are possible, [Matthew 19:24-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 19.24-26)." Thus, the recovery of such apostates is quite contrary to all reasonable expectation; nor can anything but a most extraordinary interposition of the Deity effect it.

***~~What reason is there to hope that it would ever be accomplished in them?~~***

Consider,

**1.** The dishonor they do to Christ—

Those who renounce Christianity do, in fact, proclaim Christ an impostor: they declare their approbation of the Jews who crucified him; and thus, as far as in them lies, they "crucify him afresh." But we must not confine this to avowed infidels: the same is true respecting those who decline from the ways of God, and return to a worldly and carnal life: "they put Christ to an open shame:" they proclaim to all around them, 'I once thought that it was my highest interest and happiness to serve Christ: but I was quite mistaken. I made the experiment; I became his follower; I loved him, served him, glorified him; but I found, after all, that I had given up a greater good for a lesser good. I now am assured that Christ cannot make us happy; and, therefore, I have again returned to the world, and chosen it as the better portion: and, whoever would be wise or happy, let him follow my example; let him renounce religion as a needless restraint, and despise it as an enthusiastic delusion: let him lend all his powers and faculties to the pursuits of time, and the enjoyments of sense; and let him cast off the yoke of Christ as an intolerable burden.'

Who can suppose that a man, after having cast such dishonor upon Christ, would ever be brought again to embrace and honor him? While he continues to reject the Savior, his restoration to repentance is absolutely impossible; because, there is no way to repent, but by returning to Christ, [Hebrews 10:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.26-27). And that he would return sincerely to Christ is morally impossible; because his way to Christ is barred up by shame, and fear, and almost every consideration that can influence the human mind.

**2.** The despite they do to the Holy Spirit—

This, though not adverted to in the text, is necessary to a just view of the subject, and is expressly mentioned in the same connection in a subsequent part of this epistle, verse 28, 29. It is not possible but that such apostates must have experienced on many occasions "the strivings of the Holy Spirit" with them; they must have felt many secret checks and remonstrances of conscience; all of which they must have resisted, before they could prevail upon themselves to throw off their profession of religion, and to "make shipwreck of their faith." In short, they must have altogether "quenched the Spirit," and "seared their consciences as with a hot iron."

What prospect then is there that such persons would be renewed unto repentance? If they could not maintain their ground when they had the assistances of the Holy Spirit—then how shall they recover it when he is departed from them? And what reason is there to hope that the Holy Spirit, whom they have so "grieved," and "vexed," by their misconduct, would again dwell in them, and increase his gracious communications in proportion as they have accumulated their transgressions? If the contempt which they pour upon this Divine Agent amount to what is called the sin against the Holy Spirit, their damnation is sure; it is decreed in Heaven, and sealed by their own act and deed. And, though it falls short of this unpardonable sin, still is their case almost hopeless: they are like "the earth, which, bearing only thorns and briers, is rejected, and is near unto cursing; whose end is to be burned, verse 8."

***~~This solemn subject must not be concluded without a few words of advice—~~***

***~~1. Guard against the means and occasions of apostasy—~~***

*He who would not fall, must take heed to his steps and be careful on what ground he treads.*Now we are told by God himself, that *worldly cares, worldly pleasures, worldly company are the bane of religion; and that we must guard against them all, if we would be steadfast in the faith*. We quite mistake, if we think that nothing but what is palpably sinful in itself is dangerous: almost all apostasy arises from secret neglects of duty, and from a lack of necessary self-denial. By going to the utmost boundaries of what is lawful, we are easily and imperceptibly drawn into what is unlawful. Therefore watch! Watch against error; watch against temptation; watch against the cares and pleasures of life; watch against secret declensions! In short, "let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall."

***~~2. Do not be satisfied with low spiritual attainments—~~***

It was to enforce this idea that the warning in the text was introduced by the Apostle: and therefore it demands our peculiar attention. Persons who, like "babes," are weak in the faith, are of course more liable to be turned from it: and if they do not grow towards an adult state, they will certainly decline. "Press forward then, forgetting what is behind, and reaching forth unto that which is ahead!"

***~~3. Under any backsliding, apply instantly to Christ for grace and mercy—~~***

The warning in the text is not to discourage the humble, but to alarm the careless, and quicken the remiss. The Apostle does not say that repenting sinners, however they may have apostatized, shall not be forgiven; the danger is that they will not repent; and not that, if they repent, they shall not be pardoned. Let not any then say, "I have fallen away, and therefore cannot hope for mercy;" but rather, "I have departed, and must return instantly to God in his appointed way." God himself addresses us, "Return, O backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings, and love you freely!" Let a *hope of acceptance*aid your fears of final apostasy: so shall the end of God's warnings be best accomplished, and the fulfillment of his promises secured.

***~~#2291~~***

***~~THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FRUITFUL AND BARREN PROFESSORS~~***

**[Hebrews 6:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.7-8)**

"Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned."

COMPARISONS, when just—have the double effect of illustrating, and of confirming, any truth which they set before us. They have not indeed the force of demonstration, when considered as arguments: but they are peculiarly calculated to impress the mind; and, in that view, have often a stronger effect than the clearest statements, or most logical deductions. Of this kind is *the comparison in the text, which is adduced to illustrate the guilt and danger of apostasy*. It exhibits figuratively, in a way of contrast,

***~~I. The benefit of ordinances when duly improved—~~***

***~~What is that improvement which God expects us to make of divine ordinances?~~***

Everyone knows what benefit the cultivator of any land expects from showers which water the earth; he expects, whether in his field or garden, an increased production of those fruits which he has been laboring to obtain. And what does the great Gardener labor to produce in the enclosures of his Church? Surely he looks for augmented penitence and contrition as of primary and indispensable importance. He desires that every man be brought to a more simple affiance in his dear Son, and to a more unreserved devotedness of heart and life to his service. He desires an increased mortification of all sin, and a progressive fruitfulness in all the fruits of righteousness, and a more perfect transformation into the Divine image.

***~~Where his ordinances are made subservient to this end, he will bestow the richest blessings—~~***

There is a peace which passes all understanding, which God will confer in rich abundance. He will shed abroad his love in the heart of him who thus profitably waits upon him, and will give him such testimonies of his adoption into God's family, as shall dissipate all doubt or fear either of his present acceptance with God, or of his future fruition of the heavenly glory. Yes, such testimonies as shall be a foretaste of that glory, a very beginning of Heaven in his soul. In fact, whatever the devoutest worshiper in the universe can wish for, it shall be given him in answer to his prayer, [John 15:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.7).

But it is not to all that divine ordinances are thus blessed, as we shall see from,

***~~II. The sad result of them when habitually misimproved—~~***

***~~As in barren lands, so in the Church, the showers descend on many in vain—~~***

How many are there who, after years of culture under the richest ordinances, remain as *earthly*in their minds, as *sensual*in their habits, and as *devilish*in their tempers—as the very heathen, who have never once had the means of grace given unto them: Their hearts are yet sealed up in impenitence and unbelief, as much as if they had never heard of the Savior's love, or received the offers of a free salvation.

***~~And what can these expect, but the curse of God upon them?~~***

A man will not always cultivate a field that requites all his labors with nothing but "thorns and briers:" neither will God always bestow his care on those who hold fast their iniquities, and continue unchanged under all the efforts that are made for their salvation. He has told us that "his Spirit shall not always strive with man, [Genesis 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 6.5)," and that, "if his word is not a savor of life to the life of any soul, it shall become a savor of death to his condemnation! [2 Corinthians 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.16)." To this effect God warned his Church of old, [Isaiah 5:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 5.4-6). And our blessed Lord has told us that a similar misimprovement of his Gospel will render our state worse than that of Sodom and Gomorrah! [Matthew 10:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.15).

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

***~~1. What matter here is for diligent inquiry—~~***

You see, and all around you see, the effects produced on the earth by fertilizing showers, [Isaiah 55:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.10-11); and should not similar effects be found on you? See then whether you have, both in your heart and life, an evidence of the change which the Gospel produces on all who receive it aright, and to whom it comes with power.

I must warn you of your responsibility to God for all the means of grace. You do not depart from the house of God the same persons that you were when you came into it. If you are not softened by the Word of God—then you are hardened by it: and if you are not brought nearer to God by it—then you are driven farther from him, to your everlasting confusion, [James 1:23-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.23-25).

***~~2. What reason here is for watchfulness and care—~~***

When you come to the house of God, remember that you come into the more immediate presence of the Deity; and that every word you hear, wings its way to Heaven to record the manner in which it was heard. Pray therefore to God before you go thither, and while you are there under the ministry of the word, and when you depart thence, that the word preached may be accompanied with a divine energy, and prove "the power of God to the salvation of your souls."

And, if at any time a favorable impression is made upon you, beware that you do not lose it. It is in that particular view that the Apostle suggests the comparison in my text: and I wish very particularly to put you on your guard, that you do not convert the blessing of God into a curse, and render the very means which he has bestowed for the salvation of your souls, into an occasion of deeper and heaver condemnation!

***~~#2292~~***

***~~THE THINGS THAT ACCOMPANY SALVATION~~***

**[Hebrews 6:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.9-11)**

"Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case--things that accompany salvation. God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown Him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure."

WHOEVER we address, it is needful at times that we use the language of *warning*and *admonition*. For in a mixed assembly all are not alike saved: there will always be found some *tares*among the wheat: and even the most upright may derive benefit from admonitions faithfully administered. Hence, in addressing the believing Hebrews, Paul warned them against the danger of apostasy; declaring that if they did not make a just improvement of the privileges they enjoyed, they would bring upon themselves an aggravated condemnation.

But did he therefore conceive of them as hypocrites? No; he had a good opinion of their state: "he was persuaded better things concerning them," notwithstanding he thus addressed them: yet, while he acknowledged with gratitude their active piety, he urged them to abound in it more and more.

Under a similar persuasion in respect to many of you, and with similar desires in reference to all, we proceed to point out,

***~~I. What are those things which accompany salvation—~~***

There are many things which are common both to the hypocrite and the true believer. But there are some things which belong to the true believer exclusively, and which will assuredly outcome in his everlasting happiness. *Wherever there is genuine love to the saints for Christ's sake, there is salvation*. But to speak more particularly,

***~~It must be a love to the saints, as saints—~~***

There may be a strong attachment both to individuals and collective bodies, without anything beyond the workings of nature. A great variety of considerations may give rise to the emotions of love, and the heart be as far from God as ever. Of course the bare existence of this feeling towards our fellow-creatures can be no just ground for concluding ourselves to be in a state of grace. Even love to the saints may exist on grounds which do not prove it to be of divine origin. We may love them because they are amiable in themselves, or kind to us, or an ornament of the party to which they belong. But when we love them purely because they are beloved of the Lord, and belong to him; when we love them as members of our own body; as partakers of the same divine nature with ourselves; and as heirs of the same glory—then we possess a grace which no hypocrite ever did possess, and which is inseparably connected with the salvation of the soul.

***~~This love must be operative and laborious—~~***

Our love must "not be in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth." It must be such as "works and labors in ministering" to the welfare of the objects beloved. *Love of any kind is regarded as a mere pretense, if it does not exert itself in such a way as to evince its reality by a corresponding practice.*And much more will our pretensions to so high a principle as Christian love be deemed nugatory—if we labor not to display its efficacy by a suitable conduct. The temporal and spiritual comfort of the saints must be promoted by us to the uttermost. We are not to be indifferent to the welfare of any: but, while we "do good unto all men, we must do it especially unto the household of faith." Nor must we do it merely occasionally, when more urgent circumstances arise to remind us of our duty: we must make it, as it were, our business to promote to the uttermost the edification of the body of Christ in general, and of all its members in particular. Nor must we shrink back from any "labor" that may be conducive to this end; or any sacrifice that may be requisite to the attainment of it. *It is only when our love is thus operative, that it approves itself to be a sure evidence of grace, and a certain pledge of glory.*

***~~There is yet one more ingredient in this love, namely, that it must be exercised towards the saints for Christ's sake—~~***

It must be "the love you have shown *Him*as you have helped His people and continue to help them" as reconciled to us in Christ Jesus. It is this which gives to love its chief excellence. Though the saints are ostensible objects towards whom it is exercised—yet it must in reality terminate on God in them. It is to him that everything must be done: but as he personally is out of our reach, we are to do it to them as his representatives. He is to be the one great object in whom all our affections center: and not being able to pour out our ointment upon his head, we must, in testimony of the desires of our souls, pour it out, as we are able, upon all his members.

***~~This principle so operating, most assuredly "accompanies salvation"—~~***

It is declared by our blessed Lord to be that whereby we may know to a certainty our own conversion, [1 John 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.14), and may be distinguished for his people by all who behold us, [John 13:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.35). Moreover, if we live in the exercise of this principle, we are assured by God himself, that "we shall never fall, but that an abundant entrance shall be ministered unto us 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)." So infallibly is the final salvation of the soul connected with it, that every exercise of it shall be remembered, "not so much as a cup of cold water given to a disciple in the name of a disciple, ever falling short of its reward."

Indeed, God would consider himself as "unrighteous, if he were to forget" to recompense these things in the eternal world. Not that any works of ours can claim any recompense on the ground of *merit*. But, on the ground of God's promises, we may be assured that salvation shall be given to us, if we live under the influence of this love: and we may expect it from him as a merciful, a faithful, and a "righteous Judge, [2 Timothy 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.8)."

Such being "the things that accompany salvation," we proceed to show,

***~~II. Our duty in relation to them—~~***

***~~It is the duty of all to abound in them—~~***

It is supposed in the text that the believing Hebrews had both possessed and exercised this love: indeed, it was from a persuasion of this that Paul was so well satisfied of their being in a state of acceptance with God. And we too must live under the habitual influence of this gracious principle, taking every occasion to manifest it towards the saints in acts of kindness both to their bodies and their souls. "We must walk in love, just as Christ has loved us."

***~~It is yet further our duty to persevere in these labors even "to the end"—~~***

We are "never to be weary of well doing:" never to think that we have done enough; or rather, never to think we have done anything, as long as anything remains to be done. We are not to be deterred by difficulties, nor to draw back on account of disappointments.

In extending our labors of love to all the saints, we shall sometimes find that we mistake the characters of those whom we have endeavored to serve: but we must not on this account neglect or intermit our duty. We may take the more care to discriminate between the different characters of men; but must on no account refuse to give the children their food, because some portions of our bounty have been unwittingly wasted upon dogs. If any have abused our kindness, the loss is their own: but if we neglect to show kindness, the loss is ours. We must never lay down the habit, but with our lives.

***~~In so acting we benefit ourselves no less than others—~~***

*The exercise of love is an evidence of grace; and as such, a foundation of hope.* And the more the acts of love are formed into a habit, the livelier our hope becomes, until at last it grows into a "full assurance of hope." We must again say, that it is not on our actions as meritorious, that our hopes are founded—but only as evidences of a true faith, and as evincing a state which God has promised to reward.

Having these evidences, we may as assuredly hope for glory, as if we saw the holy angels ready to bear our souls to the realms of bliss. "God is love" and, if we resemble him in this world, we may well have boldness in reference to the day of judgment, [1 John 4:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.16-17)." "We know by it infallibly that we are of the truth; and therefore may on safe grounds assure our hearts before him, [1 John 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.19)."

***~~Let me now, in applying this subject to ourselves, tell you,~~***

***~~1. What is my "persuasion" respecting you—~~***

Of many "I am persuaded," that they have these "things that accompany salvation." Many manifest it in the whole of their life and conduct; and many more would manifest it, if they had the same opportunities as are offered to others. There can be no doubt but that *the principle of Christian love is deeply implanted in the hearts of many, who from various circumstances are unable to display it as they could wish*. And we are assured, that God, who searches the heart, will bear witness to them in the last day, as well as to those who were able to carry into effect their good desires.

But, in reference to many, we have no such persuasion. Many do not even possess those things which hypocrites and apostates may have; and much less "the things which accompany salvation." How many of you are there who have never "been enlightened, never tasted of the heavenly gift, never been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, never tasted of the good Word of God, or the powers of the world to come, verse 4, 5." Alas! beloved, what hope can you enjoy? Your confidence is altogether delusive, and will deceive you to your eternal ruin.

But where these specious appearances have been found, there is in too many instances an entire lack of that gracious principle of which the text speaks. The love that has been exercised has been essentially defective in all its most distinguishing points. It has not been to the saints as saints, but on account of some accidental circumstance that has attended them: it has not been laborious and persevering, but has displayed itself only in easier services, and on more partial or particular occasions. Above all, it has not originated altogether in love to God; or been exercised simply for the glory of his name.

What then must be my persuasion respecting you? Must it not rather be, that, so far from possessing the things that accompany salvation, you have as yet "no part or lot in this matter; but are yet in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity!" Beloved brethren, think of your danger before it is too late; and beg of God that you may rest in nothing short of true conversion, and of that "hope which shall never make you ashamed."

***~~2. What is my "desire" for you—~~***

Truly this accords with that of the Apostle Paul. On behalf of "every one of you," I would desire, that you would show all diligence in the exercise of this grace; and that you would continue in the exercise of it even "to the end:" like him also I would desire it with all earnestness.

I desire it, first, on your own account: for truly *the exercise of love is a Heaven upon earth*. "Love is of God; and he who dwells in love, dwells in God, and God in him."

Look at the Christians that are full of doubts and fears; and you will almost invariably find that they are comparatively selfish, indolent, unprofitable servants, and greatly defective both in love to man and in zeal for God.

On the other hand, look at the laborious and self-denying Christians, and you will find almost invariably that they are happy in their own souls, and happy in their prospects of the eternal world. For your own sakes therefore I would say: Live in the constant exercise of love, and spare no pains to honor God and to benefit his people!

Next, I would desire it for the Church's sake. How happy must that Church be, where such is the employment of all its members! What peace, and love, and harmony will prevail among them! What mutual edification will be found in all their social fellowship! And with what joy will they go up together to the house of God! Nor will the fragrance of their graces refresh themselves only; it will be fragrant also to many who have never experienced any such emotions in their own souls, and will cause them to say, We will go with you; for we perceive that God is truly with you.

But, above all, I would desire it for the Lord's sake, that he may be glorified; for in comparison with this all other motives are weak and of no account, [2 Corinthians 9:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 9.11-14). If it is true that "herein is the Father glorified, that you bear much fruit," then it must be most eminently true, when that fruit is such as is described in our text. Has the Lord Jesus Christ said, that "what we do unto the least of his disciples, we do it unto him?" Then what delight must he feel in a Church where all the members are vying with each other in the exercises of love! "When the spices of his garden thus flow out, then our Beloved will surely come into it, and eat his pleasant fruits, [Song of Solomon 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 4.16)."

To all then of every description I say, "Walk in love!" If you have already begun this heavenly course, labor to abound more and more!

***~~#2293~~***

***~~EXHORTATION TO DILIGENCE~~***

***~~[Hebrews 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.12)~~***

"We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised."

IN the general course of God's providence, we perceive that *his blessings are dispensed in proportion to men's exertions in the pursuit of them*. And though the Disposer of all events sees fit, on some occasions, to vary his dispensations, loading the slothful with opulence, and allowing the industrious to be in want—yet *for the most part we behold diligence rewarded, and indolence put to shame*. In spiritual things none are disappointed; labor is invariably attended with success: no one asks without receiving, or seeks without finding. God uniformly shows himself a rewarder of such as diligently seek him. "To him who studies to improve his talent, more is uniformly given; and he is made to possess abundance."

The experience of the saints in all ages fully corresponds with this. No one ever suffered loss, but in consequence of his own remissness. Nor did ever any one devote himself sincerely to God, without receiving grace sufficient in the time of need.

The author of this epistle confirms these observations: for, having spoken of those who apostatize from the truth, he tells the Hebrews, that he was persuaded better things of them, and things that accompany salvation; for that they were active in every labor of love; which was to him a convincing evidence of their conversion to God. He then takes occasion to exhort them all to use the same diligence; and recommends them, if they would possess an assurance of hope, and enjoy it to the end—to press forward in the way which the patriarchal saints had trodden with such success. In his words we see,

What we must guard against in our Christian course:

***~~I. A caution—~~***

***~~There is scarcely any evil more universally prevalent than spiritual sloth—~~***

In worldly concerns, sloth is often overcome by the force and influence of other propensities: the predominant affection of the mind, whatever it is, will often gain such an ascendency, as to subdue the workings of less powerful corruptions. Yes, to such a degree will self-interest or ambition lead us to mortify our love of ease, that we shall scarcely be sensible of the existence of sloth in our hearts.

But, when once we turn our attention to spiritual things, this evil disposition will discover itself, and prove, that notwithstanding it has hitherto been concealed from our view, it had taken deep root in our souls.

In *temporal*things, our exertions are all on the side of nature. And, though we may feel some reluctance from contrary principles within us, we shall on the whole not find it so difficult to surmount their opposition.

But, in *spiritual*things, we do not advance one step without conquering the united force of all our natural inclinations. Hence the evil against which the Apostle cautions us, extends its empire over the whole world, and is to be resisted by every individual of mankind.

As Christians, we have very abundant reason to mortify and subdue spiritual sloth!

***~~1. Spiritual sloth is repugnant to our duty—~~***

A life of godliness is represented as a race and a warfare, in order to convey to us some idea of the activity and perseverance necessary for a right discharge of our duty.

Do persons in a race find time to loiter? Have they their attention diverted by every trifle around them? Do they not press forward with unremitting ardor, and exert themselves the more as they approach the goal? Do they not bear in mind the prize, and strain every nerve to gain it?

Look at those who are engaged in war, and arrived upon the field of battle; do they indulge security? Do they not watch the motions of the enemy, and animate one another to the combat, and endure almost insupportable fatigues, and expose themselves to the most imminent dangers, to defeat their enemies?

If these then are fit images to represent the Christian's duty, then what must we think of sloth? What propriety is there in these images, as applied to those who live regardless of eternity? Surely they rather form the strongest contrast to the whole life and conduct of such persons.

***~~2. Spiritual sloth is inconsistent with our Christian profession—~~***

Every one who calls himself a Christian professes:  
to value his soul,  
to serve his God,  
to be seeking Heaven.

But what value has he for his soul, who prefers every vanity before it, and cannot be prevailed upon to seek its interests?

What regard has he for God, who will not put forth all his powers to please and honor him?

What desire after Heaven has he, who will not renounce his sins, and fulfill his duties to secure it?

***~~How absurd it is to call ourselves Christians, when the whole of our conduct so flagrantly contradicts our profession!~~***

***~~3. Spiritual sloth is subversive of our welfare—~~***

Let the effects of sloth be viewed in those, who, in the judgment of charity, are not altogether destitute of true religion: how little victory have they over the world and their own corruptions, in comparison with what is attained by more diligent Christians! How little do they know of heavenly consolations! For the most part they are full of doubts and fears; and instead of enjoying that peace which surpasses all understanding, they are harassed with the accusations of a guilty conscience. Their lamps being but seldom trimmed, they afford but a dim light to the world around them, and experience but little of the light of God's countenance in their souls. Moreover, at the close of their day, they frequently set as the sun behind a cloud; and instead of having "an abundant entrance into the kingdom of their Lord," they leave the world uncertain where they are going, and what shall be the outcome of the future judgment.

If we inquire into the cause of all this, we shall find it was sloth! They too often slumbered and slept, when they should have been watching unto prayer with all perseverance. If such then be the effects of sloth, where it gains only an occasional ascendency, what must be the consequence of a habitual subjection to its dominion? Alas! its willing captives can expect nothing, but to perish under the wrath of an offended God! [Matthew 25:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.26).

Having given us this beneficial caution, the Apostle tells us,

***~~II. What line we should pursue—~~***

He proposes to our imitation the patriarchs and saints of old.

***~~These are described as "inheriting the promises"—~~***

They had not indeed received the promised Messiah, [Hebrews 11:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.39), having died long before he came into the world; but they had partaken in all the fruits and benefits which he was in due time to purchase with his blood. When on earth, they, like minors, had enjoyed as much of the inheritance as had been judged proper for them; but now they were of full age, and had attained the full possession of all the promises. Having been *adopted*into the family of God, and been *begotten*by his word and Spirit—they were *heirs*of God, and had God himself, together with all the glory of Heaven, as their unalienable portion!

***~~The way by which they attained to this inheritance was "by faith and patience"—~~***

They had no claim whatever to it upon the ground of their own merit: they all looked to that "Lamb of God who was slain from the foundation of the world." They all lived and "died in faith." "To their faith they added patience." They, no doubt, as well as we, had "fightings without, and fears within;" and sustained many sore conflicts, both with the world around them, and with their own hearts. But they "ran their race with patience," and "endured unto the end."

These therefore we would propose to ourselves as patterns.

***~~We should imitate,~~***

***~~1. Their faith—~~***

If we begin not here, we can never stir one step in the way to Heaven. We must "have like precious faith with them," renouncing all dependence on ourselves, and "making Christ our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, and our complete redemption."

***~~2. Their patience—~~***

"If we set ourselves to seek the Lord, we must prepare our hearts for trials and temptations." Cain and Ishmael have their followers in every age. We must not be offended and turn aside on account of persecution, but must "possess our souls in patience." Nor must the love of this present world, or the difficulties of our spiritual warfare, be permitted to divert us from the path of duty. Having "put our hand to the plough, we must never look back," "lest, having a promise left us of entering into God's rest, we would come short of it" at last.

***~~3. Their diligence—~~***

It is in this view more especially that we are called to follow them, "Be not slothful, but imitate them." Even those among them, who, like Moses and David, had a kingdom to govern, were yet exceedingly diligent in every duty of religion, devoting themselves entirely to the service of their God. Let us then tread in their steps: let us "walk, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil!" Let us "give all diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end;" and "whatever our hand finds to do, let us do it with all our might."

***~~If any motives are needed to enforce the Apostle's advice, consider further,~~***

***~~1. The effects of diligence in this life—~~***

The more earnest we are in serving God, the more will our hearts be comforted, our fellow-creatures benefitted, and God glorified. Let us place ourselves more especially on our death-bed, and look back from thence, not with pride and self-delight, but with gratitude and thanksgiving, on a life devoted to God: and let us contrast our state with that of one who has never done anything but treasure up wrath against the day of wrath, or one, who, though on the whole, pious, has filled his dying pillow with thorns by his remissness; and surely we shall need no other motive to fight a good fight, and war a good warfare.

***~~2. The consequences of it in the world to come—~~***

There can be no doubt but that *the greater our labor here, the richer will be our reward hereafter*: and "one star will differ widely from another star in glory." It is true, the most eminent saint might well be satisfied, and magnify the Divine goodness, if he is admitted to the lowest place in God's kingdom: but if our capacity for happiness will be enlarged by all that we do for God, and every man will be filled according to his capacity, would we not be encouraged to exert ourselves? Would we not "forget what is behind, and reach forward unto that which is ahead?" would we be contented to suffer loss in Heaven, merely because we do not lose Heaven altogether, [1 Corinthians 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.15). "Let us look to ourselves then, that we lose not the things that we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward, 2 John verse 8."

***~~#2294~~***

***~~THE CITY OF REFUGE~~***

**[Hebrews 6:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.17-18)**

"Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged."

THE multiplying of oaths is a dreadful snare to the consciences of men; and a light method of administering and of taking them is among the most heinous of our country's sins. But they run to a contrary extreme who affirm all oaths to be sinful: on many occasions they were prescribed to the Jews by God himself: the most eminent saints also, under the Christian dispensation, as well as under that of the Jews, have, on many occasions, appealed in the most solemn manner unto God.

In the passage before us God sanctions the use of oaths in concerns which are of great moment, and which cannot be settled in any other way. We are even assured that God himself has condescended to adopt this very method of confirming and establishing the minds of his people. From the Apostle's account of this astonishing transaction, we shall be led to consider,

***~~I. The description here given us of God's people—~~***

They are described by,

***~~1. Their state—~~***

They once "were, like others, children of wrath! [Ephesians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.3);" but they have been regenerated by God's Spirit, and adopted into his family. "Being thus his sons, they are also heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, [Romans 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.17)." The promises, temporal, spiritual, eternal—are their inheritance. Hence they are justly called, "the heirs of promise." To this happy state they have been brought in consequence of God's eternal counsels, [2 Timothy 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.9). But they have nevertheless attained to it in the use of means, [Ezekiel 36:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.37).

***~~2. Their conduct—~~***

Eternal life has been set before them in the Gospel; and Christ has been declared to be the only way in which that life can be found, [1 John 5:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.11-12). This record they have believed: and, feeling their utter need of mercy, they have sought it in Christ, [Galatians 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.16). They have regarded him as the city of refuge, in which the man-slayer found protection from the avenger of blood; and have fled to him with holy earnestness as their only hope, [Numbers 35:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 35.11-12). In this way they have "laid hold" of God's promised mercy; and have attained to that state in which they may assuredly expect it.

That these are the most highly favored of all people will appear, if we consider,

***~~II. The regard which God manifests towards them—~~***

***~~He wills that they would enjoy "strong consolation"—~~***

He would not have them held in doubtful suspense, or be harassed by fluctuations of hope and fear. He wishes rather that they would enjoy the privileges of their high station. *Though they have in themselves much cause to fear—yet in Jesus they have reason to exult and triumph*. They would "know in whom they have believed, and that he is both able and willing to keep what they have committed to him, [2 Timothy 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.12)."

***~~In order to this he would have them persuaded of "the immutability of his counsel"—~~***

*Nothing more contributes to the comfort of God's people than a view of everything as subjected to his unchanging will and irresistible control.*If only they learn to refer everything to his overruling agency or righteous permission, then all cause for disquietude will cease. Do the dispensations of his providence appear dark? The soul will be satisfied when it can say, "This has God done! [1 Samuel 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 3.18)." If events seem to contradict the promises, the reflection that God's ways are unsearchable will silence every murmur, and dispose us to trust God, until he shall be pleased to unfold his purposes to our view, [Hebrews 11:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.17-19). Abraham's faith as described in these, verses will admirably illustrate the subject, "Who shall separate me from the love of God?" is the triumphant challenge that will be given to all our enemies, as soon as ever we see God appointing everything with immutable and unerring wisdom, [Romans 8:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.33).

***~~For this purpose God confirms his promise with an oath—~~***

His promise could not be made more sure. But we are prone to unbelief. On this account he condescends to consult our weakness, and to swear by himself, that we may be the more firmly persuaded of his veracity. Even though God had not sworn, he never could have receded from his engagements, seeing "it is impossible for God to lie." But his oath is calculated to satisfy the most fearful mind; and must convince us, beyond a possibility of doubt, that he will never leave us nor forsake us, [Hebrews 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.5).

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How astonishing is the condescension of God!~~***

That God would voluntarily lay himself under any obligations at all to us, may well excite our astonishment. But that he would so far indulge those who doubt his veracity, as to confirm his promises with an oath, with a view to their more abundant consolation and encouragement, is a condescension of which we could have formed no idea. In this he has cast a reflection, as it were, upon his own character, in order that he might silence their unreasonable doubts. But he is God and not man, and therefore he could submit to such a degradation. O let all of us admire and adore him! And let us be careful that we "receive not this grace of God in vain, [2 Corinthians 6:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.1)."

***~~2. How great is the sin of unbelief!~~***

Unbelief says, in fact, not only that "it is possible for God to lie," but that He is indeed "a liar! [1 John 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.10)." How would such an indignity be borne by us, especially if we had never given the slightest occasion for it, but had fulfilled every promise that we had ever made? No doubt then God must be displeased whenever we cast such a reflection upon him. And if now, after he has confirmed his promise with an oath, we disbelieve him, the affront will be aggravated in a tenfold degree, and our guilt be proportionably increased. Let us know then, that "not one jot or tittle of his word can fail;" and rest assured, that, if we trust in him, we shall never be confounded, [Isaiah 45:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.17).

***~~3. How wide is the difference between God's people and the world at large!~~***

There may be but little visible difference between them: but they do differ very widely; nor is the difference the less real because it is invisible.

The godly have fled for refuge to Christ as their only hope: they make the promises of God in Christ their boast, and their inheritance: and, while God regards them as his heirs, he fills them with a peace that surpasses all understanding.

But what hope have the careless and ungodly world? What consolation have they from the immutability of God? All their comfort is founded on the hope that God is a liar, and that all of his promises and threatenings are lies! Hence, instead of being children and heirs of God—they are children of the wicked one, and inheritors of his infernal portion. Let these awful truths sink deep into our minds. And "let us not be of those who turn back unto perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of their souls, [Hebrews 10:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.39)."

***~~#2295~~***

***~~THE CHRISTIAN'S ANCHOR~~***

***~~[Hebrews 6:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.19-20)~~***

"We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek."

THIS life, we know, is but a passage to the eternal world; a wilderness state, leading to the heavenly Canaan. In it we meet with trials, which are necessary for the exercise of our faith and patience: but in the midst of trials, we are favored with consolations and supports, perfectly adequate to our necessities, and sufficient for our wants. The lives of Abraham and the patriarchs are very instructive to us in this view. They had promises in abundance; but did not actually possess the things promised. They were called to endure much, before their course was run; and "through faith and patience they inherited the promises, verse 12." Thus are we also to "walk by faith, and not by sight;" and "patiently to endure" our destined trials, in the assured expectation of "obtaining in due season the promised blessings, verse 15."

In the mean time, like mariners, we have "an anchor" provided for us, which shall hold us fast amidst the storms and tempests with which we are assailed, and secure our ultimate arrival at the desired haven. This is declared in the words which we have just read; and which will lead me to show you,

***~~I. What is "the anchor" here spoken of—~~***

The universal voice of commentators has, together with our English version, determined it to be "HOPE," and from such a host it seems the greatest presumption to differ. Nor indeed would we be guilty of such presumption, if we could by any means acquiesce in the general sentiment.

But the word "hope" is printed in italics, to show that it is not in the original; and, consequently, the only question is: What is the word which would have been supplied from the foregoing context? or, What is the antecedent to which the relative in our text refers?

I will, with the diffidence that becomes me, state my view of this question: and leave every one to adopt, or reject, my alteration, as he shall see fit. I will first, then, state my reasons why I think the word "hope" is not the word to be supplied.

The word "hope," in the preceding context, must unquestionably mean the object of hope; but in the text it is put for the grace of hope: for it is something within ourselves which we have as "an anchor," and which is to he cast by us on something that is without. But to use the relative in a sense so essentially different from that in which its antecedent is used, is a construction that should never be admitted, without an absolute and indispensable necessity.

If it is said, that in the text it may be used for the object of hope, I answer, that it cannot with any propriety; for it can scarcely be made sense. Moreover, if taken in that sense, it will be the same as the Forerunner, who is said to have entered where that is.

The true antecedent, I conceive, and consequently the proper word to have been inserted, is, the word "consolation:" and this will appear from a minute consideration of the context. It is true, the word "hope" occurs in the last member of the preceding sentence, while the word "consolation" is more remote; but the member of the sentence immediately preceding the text is nothing but a periphrasis for "we," or a description of the persons spoken of; and if the word "we" be taken without that particular description annexed to it, the connection between the relative and antecedent will be perfectly clear: "God has confirmed his promise with an oath, that we might have strong consolation; which consolation we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast." The remarkable parallelism also between the words—a parallelism sufficiently observable in the translation, but still more marked in the original—renders this construction yet more obvious. God designed "that we would have consolation; which consolation we have:" he designed that we would have strong consolation; and strong it is, even an "anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast." Thus, to say the least, there is nothing forced in this construction; but, on the contrary, it is plain and simple, and such as could not possibly have been avoided, if that member, which is a mere periphrasis, or description of the persons possessing that consolation, had not intervened.

But can "consolation" properly be called "an anchor of the soul?" Most assuredly it may: for where consolation is lacking, the soul is liable to be tempest-tossed, and driven to and fro by every wind of temptation; but where consolation abounds, there the soul is kept firm and immoveable; agreeably to what God himself has said, "The joy of the Lord is our strength, [Nehemiah 8:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 8.10)." And hence Paul unites the two, in his prayer for the Thessalonian converts: "Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which has given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and establish you in every good word and work, [2 Thessalonians 2:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.16-17)."

I say then, that the word "consolation" should, if my view of it be right, have been here supplied; even the consolation arising from a view of "the immutability of God's counsels," which are made over to us in express promises, and confirmed to us with an oath: it is this consolation, I say, which is indeed "the anchor of the soul" spoken of in our text.

It is remarkable, that in other parts of this same epistle, the Apostle speaks of his consolation in precisely the same view: "We," says he, "are Christ's house, if we hold fast the confidence, and the rejoicing of the hope, firm unto the end:" and again, "We are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast 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). "Cast not away your confidence, which has great recompense of reward, [Hebrews 10:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.35)."

That "hope" may be fitly represented as an anchor, there can be no doubt; but the doubt is, what is the anchor here spoken of: and that, I say again, is the consolation arising from an assured confidence in the promise and oath of an unchanging God.

Let us now proceed to consider,

***~~II. On what ground it must be cast—~~***

It is said to "enter into that within the veil." Other anchors descend into the deep: this anchor ascends to the highest heavens, and lays hold on the very throne of God!

We might here speak of the things which were within the veil; as the mercy-seat, on which abode the bright cloud, the Shechinah, the symbol of the Deity; and the ark, which contained the law, and which was covered by the mercy-seat: and we might show how this anchor of the soul fixes on them, even on our reconciled God and Father, and on the Lord Jesus Christ, who has fulfilled the law for us. But it will be better to adhere more simply to the preceding context, and to speak of *the anchor as fixing on the immutability of a promise-keeping God*. This is a proper foundation for it to rest upon: nor can we by any means lay too fast hold upon it. For, God has from all eternity entered into covenant with his only-begotten Son; engaging, if he would assume our nature, and "make his soul an offering for sin, he would see a seed who would prolong their days, and the pleasure of the Lord would prosper in his hand, [Isaiah 53:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.10)." To this the Son consented: and, having taken our nature upon him, he has fulfilled every part of his engagement; never ceasing from his work until he could say, "It is finished."

Now, will the Father recede from his engagements? Assuredly not: for "He is not a man, that he would lie; or the son of man, that he would repent, [Numbers 23:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 23.19)." Having confirmed "his promise with an oath, it is impossible for him to lie;" since "both the one and the other are absolutely immutable, verse 18." On this covenant, then, we may lay hold; and on it we may rest, as "ordered in all things, and sure, [2 Samuel 23:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 23.5)." In it, everything is provided for us that we can stand in need of, whether for time or for eternity: it engages to impart to every one that has been given to Christ, pardon and peace, and holiness and glory.

On nothing short of this must our anchor fix. It must rest on nothing that is in us: no frames, no feelings, no experiences, no attainments. From God's covenant all our hopes flow; and on that must they all rest. We, alas! are changeable; and on us can no confidence be placed. But God is unchangeable, in all his purposes, which are unalterably fixed, "according to the counsel of his own will, [Ephesians 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.11);" in all "his promises, which are all yes, and amen, in Christ Jesus, [2 Corinthians 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.20);" and in all his gifts, for "his gifts and calling are without repentance, [Romans 11:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.29)." This is a foundation which will hold us fast; as it is said, "The foundation of God stands sure; the Lord knows those who are his, [2 Timothy 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.19)."

But, as this anchor is said to be sure and steadfast, it will be proper for me to show,

***~~III. From whence it derives its power and tenacity—~~***

In order that a tempest-tossed vessel may be preserved in safety, it is necessary that the anchor itself would be of a good quality, and that the anchorage would be firm. And both these are requisite for the establishing of the soul: the "consolation" must not be like "that of the hypocrite, which is but for a moment, [Job 20:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 20.5);" or that of the novice, which will give way on the very first assault of temptation, [Matthew 13:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.20-21). It must be far more solid; but it must be formed in us by God, even by the Holy Spirit, the Comforter: and it must lay hold on God himself, and derive all its efficacy from him.

But still, it is not from the strength of the anchor that our stability will be derived; but from the Lord Jesus Christ, who will render it effectual for its desired end.

It is not obvious, at first sight, why the Forerunner would be mentioned: for what has Jesus, as our Forerunner, to do with our anchor entering within the veil? But, on a closer inspection, it will be found, that though there is an apparent change in the figure, there is a perfect unity in the subject; the whole power and tenacity of our anchor being derived from Him, who has entered into the very place where that anchor is cast: for it is by means of the very same anchor that he himself has entered there, even as all the saints before him did, [Hebrews 11:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.10); [Hebrews 11:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.14); [Hebrews 11:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.16); [Hebrews 11:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.26); [Hebrews 11:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.35); and he is entered there expressly "for us," that he may secure to us the very same outcome as he himself has attained.

Let us enter a little more distinctly into this. I say, that it was by means of the very same anchor that Jesus himself rode out the storms with which he was assailed, and is now at rest in the desired haven. See him in the midst of all his storms: hear his reply to the most powerful of all his adversaries: "You could have no power at all against me, except it were given you from above, [John 19:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 19.11)." Here his perfect confidence in an unchanging God is the manifest source of his stability.

But to see this anchor in full operation, mark it as described by the Prophet Isaiah: "The Lord God will help me: therefore I shall not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint; and I know that I shall not be ashamed. He is near that justifies me: who will contend with me? let us stand together: who is mine adversary? let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord God will help me: who is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old, as does a garment: the moth shall eat them up, [Isaiah 50:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 50.7-9)." And was this an empty boast? No! this anchor held him fast, through all the storms that earth and Hell could raise against him; as Paul informs us, saying, that "for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, and despised the shame, and has sat down on the right hand of the throne of God [Hebrews 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.2)."

It may still however be asked, what are his triumphs to us? I answer, He is not entered within the veil for himself only, but "for us;" that he may "appear in the presence of God for us, [Hebrews 9:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.24)," and secure to us the same blessed rest which he himself has attained. While we are casting our anchor within the veil, he, by his grace, enables us to do it, and keeps the anchor itself from losing its hold. And, while we are confiding in the promises of God, and pleading them at the throne of grace, he is pleading for us, as our Advocate, before the throne of glory: he is pleading the covenant which the Father has made with him, in behalf of all the members of his mystical body. Thus is he there engaged, on God's part, as it were, to afford us all needful support; and on our part, to remind the Father of his engagements, and to see them all fulfilled.

But there is yet a further connection between these things, which must by no means be overlooked. The Lord Jesus is entered into Heaven, not as our Advocate merely, but as our Head and Representative: so that we may be fitly said to be already "sitting with him in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, [Ephesians 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.6)." We are one with him, as our federal head, [1 Corinthians 15:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.22); yes, we are one with him also by a vital union, as members of his body, [John 15:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.1-2); we are even "one spirit with him, [1 Corinthians 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.17);" "our life is hidden with Christ in God:" he is "our very life" itself: and hence it is that neither earth nor Hell can ever prevail against us; according as it is written, "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)."

***~~Now this subject may well show us:~~***

***~~1. What is the proper and legitimate use of the deeper doctrines of our holy religion.~~***

While, by some, the doctrines of predestination and election are made for the display of their controversial skill, and are brought forward on all occasions as if they were the very milk of the Gospel, fit indiscriminately for the contemplation of all; to others, the very mention of the words sounds almost as blasphemy. But these doctrines are true, and capable of the most valuable improvement; though, if entered upon with an unhallowed and contentious spirit, they may prove as injurious as they are to the humble mind truly beneficial. "The godly consideration of them," as our Seventeenth Article states, "is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons; …. as well because it does greatly establish and confirm their faith of eternal salvation, to be enjoyed through Christ, as because it does fervently kindle their love towards God. But, for curious and carnal persons, lacking the Spirit of Christ, to have continually before their eyes the sentence of God's predestination, is a most dangerous downfall, whereby the devil does thrust them, either into desperation, or into the wretchedness of most immoral living, no less perilous than desperation."

The true use of them, is to compose the mind with a humble affiance in God, as unbounded in mercy and unchangeable in his promises. They lead us to refer every mercy to God, as "the Author," and to look to him for the continuance of it, as "the Finisher," of our salvation, [Hebrews 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.2). A just view of these doctrines, at the same time that it teaches to put away all carnal hopes, tends to raise us also above carnal fears. It shows us, that, in the whole work of man's salvation, the creature is nothing, and God is all: it furnishes us with a consolation which nothing can destroy, and with a strength which nothing can overcome. In a word, it is "an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast."

It is quite a mistake to imagine that the possession of this anchor supersedes the necessity of care on our part: we must be as diligent in the use both of the chart and compass, as if we had no such means of safety on board. It will never justify us in running needlessly amidst rocks and quicksands; nor do we ever find such a use made of it among the saints of God. Its use is to keep us steadfast in a time of need: and, if improved to that end, it will be found of incalculable advantage to the believing soul.

***~~2. The advantage which the Christian has over all other people upon earth—~~***

A man that knows not God as a merciful and unchanging God, knows not where to look in a time of trial. He may, indeed, comfort himself with some general notions of God's mercy; but he has no solid ground of hope; nor can he ever know what is meant by "the peace of God which surpasses all understanding." But the truly enlightened Christian can glory in the midst of tribulations: for he refers all to God, who is:  
too *wise*to err,  
too *mighty*to be foiled,  
too faithful to forsake his people!

He views God as presiding in every storm, and as "ordering all things for the good of his own people, [Romans 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.28). He regards not the various circumstances which occur, as though they were accidental: whatever their aspect is, he considers them as parts of one great whole; and, whether the steps which he is constrained to take in this wilderness appears, in the eye of sense, to be progressive or retrograde, he still bears in mind, that they are leading him "in the right way," to the city of habitation, the heavenly Jerusalem! [Psalm 107:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 107.7).

Behold this illustrated in the Apostle Paul. What storms and tempests he had to sustain, you well know: but was he appalled by them? No! "he knew in whom he had believed; and that He was able to keep that which he had committed to him, 2 Timothy 1:12."

"Who," says he, "is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, yes rather, who is risen again; who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For your sake we are killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him who loved us. 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! [Romans 8:34-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.34-39)."

Here you see the anchor in the full discharge of its office; and here you behold a stability which no created power could impart. This shows the Christian in his true light. I pray God we may all have an ever-increasing measure of that confidence in God which so mightily upheld his soul; and that we may thus be "kept in safety for that inheritance, which we know to be reserved in Heaven for us! [1 Peter 1:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.4-5)."

***~~#2296~~***

***~~MELCHIZEDEK A TYPE OF CHRIST~~***

***~~[Hebrews 7:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.1-3)~~***

"This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, his name means "king of righteousness"; then also, "king of Salem" means "king of peace." Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever."

THE principal scope of the Epistle to the Hebrews, is to show the superiority of Christ above the ordinances and dispensers, of the Levitical law. In prosecuting this argument the inspired writer frequently mentions a priesthood different from that of Aaron, a priesthood instituted by God before any one of Abraham's chosen descendants was born, and consequently intended for the benefit of the Gentile world; and he shows that Christ was, according to an express prediction, and a most solemn oath, to be a priest of this higher order, the order of Melchizedek, [Psalm 110:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 110.4) with [Hebrews 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.6); [Hebrews 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.10); [Hebrews 6:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.20); [Hebrews 7:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.17); [Hebrews 7:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.21).

The words of the text are properly be connected with chapter 5:10, the whole intervening part being, as it were, a parenthesis. The Apostle, having laid great stress upon this prediction, now proceeds to illustrate it. He recites, in few words, the history to which the prediction itself refers, and declares, that it was altogether typical of Christ, [Genesis 14:14-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 14.14-20). The agreement between Melchizedek and Christ may be observed in two particulars:

***~~I. The dignity of their persons—~~***

Melchizedek, in reference to the import of his name, and the name of the city over which he presided, was called, king of righteousness, and king of peace. But *in an infinitely higher degree do these titles belong to Christ!*

Christ is a king, not only over one city or country, but over the whole world, "his kingdom rules over all;" "he has the utmost ends of the earth for his possession;" he is "King of kings, and Lord of lords." In his own person he is holy, harmless, separate from sinners, "he loves righteousness, and hates iniquity;" he is indeed "the Holy One, and the Just." *His laws are a perfect transcript of his mind and will, all holy, and just, and good.*In his government he exercises the most perfect equity, not oppressing or despising any, but ever ready to afford protection, and support, to all who call upon him.

The very *ends*for which he administers his government, are altogether worthy of his divine majesty; he rules his people, only that he may transform them all into his own image, and make them "partakers of his own holiness." In every view, he approves himself worthy of that august title which the voice of inspiration assigns him, "The Lord our Righteousness! [Jeremiah 23:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.6)."

But Jesus is also called, "The Prince of peace! [Isaiah 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 9.6);" nor is this without reason, since he reconciles us to an offended God, and makes peace for us by the blood of his cross: yes, he brings peace into the wounded conscience; and calms the tempests which were accustomed to agitate the soul.

That typical king, Melchizedek, is also called a "priest of the Most High God;" yet, though glorious in this respect, he was only a shadow of Jesus, our great High-priest.

Melchizedek, though a king, was not ashamed to execute the priestly office. Whether the bread and wine, which he provided for the refreshment of Abraham's troops, had any mystical signification, we cannot say: but certainly he acted as a priest, when he blessed Abraham; and was regarded as a priest by Abraham, who presented to him the tenth of all his spoils.

As for Jesus, there was not any part of the priestly office which he did not perform. He was not indeed of that tribe to which the priesthood belonged, and therefore he was not instituted "according to the law of a carnal commandment;" but he was appointed of God with a solemn oath; and anointed to his office with a superabundant measure of the oil of gladness, [Psalm 45:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 45.7). Having, in order that he might have something to offer, taken upon him our nature, he "presented himself an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor." And having shed his own blood, he is gone with it within the veil, and there carries on the work of intercession for us; and will soon come forth again, not like the Jewish high-priest, to bless one nation only, but, like Melchizedek, to bless the father of the faithful, together with all his children dispersed throughout the world.

Thus both in their *names*and *offices*is there a very striking agreement between Melchizedek and Christ. But the parallel between them may be yet further noticed in,

***~~II. The duration of their priesthood—~~***

***~~We are altogether indebted to Scripture revelation for a just construction of what was related respecting Melchizedek, and of what was intentionally omitted in his history—~~***

Melchizedek, like other men, was doubtless born of human parents, and in due season cut off by death from this present state of existence. But there is no mention made of his birth, or parentage, or death: nothing is said of any predecessor, whom he followed in his office, or of any successor to whom he resigned his office. These omissions, which might have been well accounted for from the brevity of that part of the Mosaic history, we are assured were ordered of God, on purpose that, by appearing "not to have beginning of days or end of life," he might, as far as a mortal man could do, shadow forth the eternity of Christ's priesthood.

***~~What was figuratively ascribed to him, is literally true with respect to Christ—~~***

Christ, though born after the world had stood four thousand years, was appointed to this office from all eternity; and actually executed it, by his representatives at least, from the first moment that Adam or Abel offered their sacrifices on the altar. Nor has he ceased from his priestly work: he is now within the veil, offering up the incense of his own prevailing intercession, while his people continue praying without. Nor will he desist from his labor as long as there shall continue one single soul for whom to intercede before God. As he had none to precede him in his office, so will he have none to follow him: "He abides a priest continually, the same yesterday, today, and forever! [Hebrews 7:23-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.23-25); [Hebrews 7:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.28); [Hebrews 13:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.8)."

***~~Advice—~~***

***~~1. Regard the Lord Jesus according to his real dignity—~~***

Jesus unites in himself the kingly and priestly character. None of the Levitical kings or priests ever attained to this honor. Uzziah, presuming to exercise the priestly office, was smitten with a leprosy, and made a monument of the Divine displeasure to the last hour of his life, [2 Chronicles 26:16-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 26.16-21). But Jesus, as was foretold concerning him, was, like Melchizedek, "a priest upon his throne, [Zechariah 6:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 6.13)." Let us view this combination of character with sincere gratitude. Let us contemplate him as every way qualified to be a Savior to us. And let us beg that he will exalt us also to "a royal priesthood, that we may offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through him, [1 Peter 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.5); 1 Peter 2:9."

***~~2. Look to him for the blessings which he is authorized to bestow—~~***

As our exalted head "he is a Prince and a Savior, to give repentance and remission of sins." "He has received gifts even for the most rebellious:" and, having given himself for us, he is fully authorized to bestow upon us the purchase of his blood. Shall we not then make our application to him? What "bread and what wine" would he not bestow on us for the refreshment of our weary souls! Shall we not then "open our mouths wide that he may fill them?" Surely, "If we are straitened, it is not in him, but in ourselves." He would "satisfy the hungry with good things;" he would "fill us with all the fullness of God." O that that "God, who raised him up from the dead, would now send him to bless us, in turning every one of us from our iniquities! [Acts 3:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.26)."

***~~3. Consecrate to him, not the tenth only of your spoils, but all that you possess—~~***

Though we should "honor him with our substance, and with the first-fruits of all our increase," yet that is by no means sufficient. We should dedicate to him all that we possess in mind, or body, or estate. We are not indeed called to dispose of all our goods in charity, but to ascribe to his bounty everything we possess, and "whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do—to do it all to his glory."

Have we overtaken as Abraham did, and destroyed, our spiritual enemies? Let us acknowledge that "his was the power, and the glory, and the victory." Let us see him in all things, and glorify him for all things; and "present to him both our bodies and our souls a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is our reasonable service, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1)."

***~~#2297~~***

***~~THE SUPERIORITY OF THE CHRISTIAN DISPENSATION ABOVE THE MOSAIC DISPENSATION~~***

***~~[Hebrews 7:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.18-19)~~***

"The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God."

THAT the Jewish religion is superseded by the Christian religion, is well known: but *why*it is superseded, and what relation the two have to each other, is not so generally considered.

The true light in which the law is to be considered, is this: it was "a *shadow*of the things which were to be more fully revealed by the Gospel," or a *scaffolding*erected for a season for the purpose of constructing the edifice of Christianity, and to be removed of course as of no further use, when that building would be complete.

It is in this view that the Apostle speaks of it in the passage before us. He has shown that, while the law was yet in the summit of its glory, David foretold, that a priesthood, of an order totally different from that established by Moses, would be introduced; and that consequently all the rites and ceremonies connected with the Levitical priesthood would be done away. The reason that he assigns for this is, that the *legal*economy was "weak and unprofitable." Not that it was so in that particular view in which it was designed by God; but that it was so as far as related to those ends which the Jews, through the ignorance of its nature, expected to be answered by it.

As a scaffolding is of use for the building of a house, but most unprofitable if resorted to as a residence instead of the house, so the law was good, as a typical exhibition of the way of salvation; but it is weak and unprofitable to those who would expect salvation by it. Salvation was, from the beginning, intended to be, and could be, by the Gospel alone: "for the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by which we draw near to God."

It is our intention to mark,

***~~I. The difference between the Mosaic and the Christian dispensation—~~***

By "the law," the whole dispensation of Moses was meant. By "the introduction of a better hope," is meant the dispensation of Christ; which alone affords a solid ground of hope to sinful men. The things which the law could not effect, the Gospel does—it gives us,

***~~1. Perfect reconciliation with God—~~***

The sacrifices which were offered under the law could never take away sin. There was nothing in them that was at all suited to this end. What was there in the blood of an animal to make satisfaction to Divine justice for the sin of man? The Apostle truly says, it was not possible for the blood of bulls and of goats to take away sin, [Hebrews 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.4).

But the Gospel points us to an atonement which was of infinite value, even the blood of God's co-equal, co-eternal Son. This might well satisfy even for the sins of the world; because *more honor was done to the Divine law by His performing its commands and suffering its penalties, than could have been done by the obedience or suffering of the whole human race*. Hence the Scriptures invariably represent the Father as "reconciled to the world by the death of his Son;" and as requiring nothing more of us, than to come to him in the name of his Son, pleading the merits of his blood, and relying wholly on his atoning sacrifice. To all such persons he says, that, "though their sins may have been as crimson, they shall be as white as snow;" and that they not only shall be, but actually are, from the first moment of their believing, "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)."

In this view the Gospel is called "the ministry of reconciliation:" and the one message which all the ministers of the Gospel have to declare, is, 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)."

***~~2. Perfect peace of conscience—~~***

The annual repetition of the same sacrifices under the Mosaic dispensation showed that the sins for which they were offered were not yet fully pardoned. Hence they were rather "remembrances of sins" than actual means of forgiveness: and consequently "they could not make men perfect as pertaining to the conscience, [Hebrews 9:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.9-10); [Hebrews 10:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.1-3)."

But the atoning "blood of Christ really cleanses from all sin." It "purges the conscience, [Hebrews 9:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.14);" so that, being justified by it, "we have peace with God," and in our souls "a peace which passes all understanding." "In fleeing to Christ for refuge, and laying hold on that hope that is set before us, we have strong consolation." Divine justice being satisfied, we are satisfied also. "We know in whom we have believed, and are assured that he is able to keep that which we have committed to him." According to his promise, "he keeps our minds in perfect peace, because we trust in him:" he fills us with "peace and joy in believing," yes, "with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

***~~3. Perfect holiness of heart and life—~~***

The law commanded, but gave no strength for obedience. But Christ procured for his followers the gift of the Holy Spirit, "by whose effectual aid we can do all things" that are required of us. Absolute perfection indeed is not to be expected in this life: for even Paul, after having ministered in the Gospel for twenty years, said of himself, "I have not yet attained, neither am I already perfect."

But evangelicalperfection, which consists in an unreserved surrender of our whole souls to God, we may, and must attain. For this purpose are "the *Scriptures*given, that by them the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works, [2 Timothy 3:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.16-17)." For this purpose are the *promises*in particular revealed, that "by them we may cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God, [2 Corinthians 7:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.1)."

Nor is holiness merely provided for us; it is actually secured to us by the Gospel, "Sin shall not have dominion over us, because we are not under the law, but under grace." On the contrary, we shall be made "new creatures," and "be renewed after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness." This is "that which the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh; and which God, sending his own Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh, as a sacrifice for sin, has done. He has so condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law shall be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit, [Romans 8:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.3-4)."

Corresponding with this difference is,

***~~II. The distinguishing benefit which we enjoy under our dispensation—~~***

The access to God which Christians possess, results entirely from the nature of the dispensation under which they live: and the Apostle, in speaking of it, includes two things:

***~~1. The liberty which we have of drawing near to God—~~***

The whole of the Jewish ritual tended rather to keep men at an solemn distance from God than to bring them near to him. There was one court for the priests, into which they alone had admittance: and into the holy of holies none but the high-priest could enter—and he only on one day in the year; and then only according to certain forms that were prescribed. By these restrictions "the Holy Spirit signified that the way into the holy place was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was yet standing, [Hebrews 9:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.8)." Had anyone presumed to violate this law, he would have instantly been visited, if not with a fatal stroke, at least (as King Uzziah was) with some awful calamity.

But for us there is "a new and living way opened through the veil, [Hebrews 10:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.20-22)," which was rent in twain from the top to the bottom at the very moment of our Savior's death! And, as by Christ "we have access unto the Father," so we are told to "come with boldness into the holiest by his blood." The golden scepter is held out to every one of us, so that we may "come boldly to the throne of grace," assured of obtaining mercy, and of "finding grace to help us in the time of need".

***~~2. The delight which we have in the exercise of that liberty—~~***

The approaches of persons to God under the law were full of burdensome ceremonies; but those under the Gospel are intimate and delightful. "God draws near to us, while we draw near to Him." On those occasions, "he manifests himself unto us as he does not unto the world:" he "lifts up the light of his countenance upon us," and "sheds abroad his love in our hearts." Hence the Christian accounts prayer not so much a duty as a privilege: he says with the beloved Apostle, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ".

This arises entirely out of the nature of our dispensation, which is justly called, "the perfect law of liberty." It presents to our view our great High-priest entered for us within the veil, and "ever living to make intercession for us." And, "having such a high-priest, we draw near unto God with full assurance of faith." Nor does he take less pleasure in communing with us, than we with him; for "the prayer of the upright is his delight!"

***~~Learn from hence the true reason why the generality of professing Christians differ so little from the Jews or heathen—~~***

They do not understand the nature of the dispensation under which they live; and therefore they get no material good from their religion. They are not made holy by it, nor are they made happy. They think that an assured sense of our acceptance with God is unattainable; and that communion with Him is an enthusiastic dream.

They regard Christianity as little else than a milder publication of the law; reducing the demands of the law to the present ability of man, and making ample allowances for man's infirmity.

They view it as a system of duties, rather than of privileges; and they expect more from their partial obedience to its precepts, than from a humble affiance in its promises.

What wonder then if, when when they so assimilate the Gospel to the law, they experience no more benefit from it than the law conveyed? What wonder, I say, if they never are made perfect by such a religion as theirs.

Would we attain to perfect love, and perfect peace, and perfect holiness, we must look more to the atoning blood of Christ, and to the sanctifying influences of his Spirit. In the former, we shall find all that we need for our reconciliation with God; and in the latter, all that we need for our restoration to his image. The Gospel, mutilated and debased by unbelief, will bring us neither present nor eternal happiness: but if embraced, as it ought to be, with unmixed, unshaken confidence, it will prove "the power of God to the salvation of our souls!"

***~~#2298~~***

***~~CHRIST'S PRIESTHOOD, AND ABILITY TO SAVE~~***

***~~[Hebrews 7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.25)~~***

"Therefore he is able to save to the uttermost, all who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them."

THE Mosaic economy was never intended to be either universal or perpetual.

It was not universal, because many of the principal rites prescribed by it could never be performed by those who were far distant from Judea.

It was not perpetual, because, while it was yet in all its force and grandeur, its dissolution, and the establishment of a better in its stead, were expressly and frequently foretold.

The appointment of another priesthood to supersede that of Aaron, was of itself, as the Apostle teaches us, sufficient to prove that the *abolition*of the Aaronic priesthood and of the whole Levitical law was to take place, as soon as that better priesthood after the order of Melchizedek would be established.

The show wherein that priesthood was superior, is the great scope of the chapter before us. But it is to one particular only that we shall confine our attention at this time; and that is, the continuance of it in one person, while the Aaronic priests were removed by death, and constrained to transmit their office to a successor.

We notice then,

***~~I. The perpetuity of Christ's priesthood—~~***

"The priests under the law were many, because they were not allowed to continue by reason of death: but this man, the Lord Jesus Christ, because he continues ever, has an unchangeable priesthood." "He ever lives to make intercession for us."

When in a vision he revealed himself to John, he said, "I am he who lives, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore! [Revelation 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.18)." "He was indeed crucified through weakness; but yet he lives by the power of God, 2 Corinthians 13:4;" and "being raised from the dead, he dies no more; death has no more dominion over him, [Romans 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.9)." Nor is it merely in a state of rest that he lives; but for the purpose of carrying on his priestly office in our behalf.

The high-priest under the law, when he had offered the sacrifice upon the altar, carried the blood within the veil into the holy of the holies, there to sprinkle it before, and on the mercy-seat, and to offer incense in the more immediate presence of his God. This is the very thing which Jesus now lives to effect. Having offered himself a sacrifice upon the cross, he has now gone with his own blood into Heaven itself, there to exhibit it as a memorial before God, and as the ground of all his intercessions. In his Father's presence he pleads it for us as a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the world, and as the price paid for all those blessings which his people stand in need of for their full and complete salvation. True it is, that he has entered into Heaven, to take possession of that glory which by the covenant-engagements entered into by the Father was to be conferred on his human nature: but yet, it was not for his own glory only that he ascended thither, but for our good; that he might carry on and perfect in our behalf the work he had undertaken for us.

Only let us contemplate the *ends*for which the high-priest on the great day of atonement entered into the holy of holies; and we shall have a distinct, and accurate, and perfect view of the ends for which our blessed Savior has gone into Heaven, and of the work which he is there living to accomplish. Here a distinct view may be taken of the pleas founded upon his sacrifice, as having been appointed of the Father for certain ends, and offered by the Son in the full confidence of its being accepted of the Father, and of its prevailing for all who trust in it.

But without further dwelling on so clear a point, let us proceed to notice,

***~~II. The consolatory truths resulting from Christ's priesthood—~~***

As the continual changing of the priests under the Mosaic dispensation showed the weakness and unprofitableness of their ministrations; so the unchanging continuance of Christ's priesthood shows that "he is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him!" Here observe,

***~~1. What is taken for granted—~~***

It is taken for granted that all his people "come unto God through him." If it is asked: What is meant by coming to God through him? The answer is plain: Look unto the Aaronic priests and their ministrations, and there you shall find a perfect representation of what is experienced by the people of God in all ages.

When the high-priest entered within the veil, there was but one sentiment pervading all the worshipers in every part of the temple: all considered him as their mediator and intercessor with God. They knew that of themselves they were incapable of drawing near to God: but regarding the high-priest as their head and representative, they considered themselves as approaching God in and through him. They had no hope whatever but in the blood of the sacrifice which he carried within the veil, and in the incense which he offered there. Among all the Jews there would not be any diversity of sentiment on this head.

Thus it is that we also come unto God by Christ: we see him as going into Heaven with his own blood which he has offered for us; and as presenting also the incense of his own prevailing intercession: and in him as so occupied, is all our hope. Nor is this a mere theoretical sentiment in the Christian's mind, but a living and an abiding principle, by which he is actuated in all his approaches to the throne of grace: nor has he any hope whatever of finding acceptance with God, but by coming to him in this way.

But while this striking correspondence exists between the Jewish and Christian mode of approaching God, there is one remarkable point of difference, which must by no means be overlooked. The Jew, during the mediation of the high-priest, was kept at a solemn distance, not daring to pass the limits that were assigned him: but *the Christian has access into the secret of God's presence for himself*, and may urge the very same pleas before God at the throne of grace, which his great high-priest is urging for him at the throne of glory. The pleas are the same, and the grounds of hope are the same, to each: but the superior liberty of the Christian marks the superiority of the priesthood which has procured it for him.

***~~2. What is plainly asserted—~~***

The Jewish high-priest, notwithstanding he presented all the sacrifices according to the prescribed form, could not prevail so as to obtain for the people a perfect and perpetual forgiveness: at the same period in the ensuing year he must present the same offerings again: which showed, that a further expiation was necessary in order to a full remission of their sins. But our great High-priest has no occasion ever to renew his offering: nor will he ever devolve on another the office which he executes. "He therefore is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him."

The words, "to the uttermost," imply two things; namely, that he can save *completely*and *forever*. The conscience of a Jew was never perfectly liberated from a sense of guilt by the offerings which were made for him: but the Christian is brought into a state of perfect peace, "his conscience being purged from dead works to serve the living God." Nor does he feel a need of anything more than that which he finds in the sacrifice of Christ. He looks forward to nothing to add to it, or to give it efficacy. Being once sprinkled with the blood of Christ, his soul is at rest; because he knows that Jesus by his one offering has perfected for ever those who are sanctified. *The Jew found his sacrifices to be little else than remembrances of his sins: but the Christian knows that, by virtue of his sacrifice, "his sins and iniquities shall be remembered no more!*[Hebrews 9:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.1-3); [Hebrews 9:11-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.11-18)."

***~~This subject, duly apprehended, is replete:~~***

***~~1. With instruction—~~***

If Christians were more in the habit of considering the Jewish law, they would gain a far clearer insight into the nature and principles of their own religion. Ask a professing Christian, How he is to be saved? and he will give you some vague and indistinct answer about God's mercy, and his own repentances and reformations. Even the teachers themselves, who should instruct others, are not always clear on this matter. But no Jewish priest would have hesitated to point to the sacrifices as the only means of acceptance with God.

Let us then learn from them, that, if we will ever come to God at all, it must be simply and solely by the Lord Jesus Christ: "He is the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes unto the Father but by him, [John 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.6)." And let this especially be remembered, that there is no salvation for us in any other way: "for no other persons will the Lord Jesus intercede; nor shall his saving power be exerted for any others." This is clearly intimated in the text. Whom is it that he is able to save? it is "those who come unto God by him." And for whom is it that he intercedes? "He ever lives to make intercession for *them*." O that we might all consider this, and seek the Lord in the only way in which he ever can be found!

***~~2. With consolation—~~***

What an astonishing thought it is, that our adorable Emmanuel, now seated at the right hand of God—is living, as it were, only for us, to transact our business there, as once he transacted it here on earth. From Heaven he came to offer a sacrifice for us; and to Heaven has he gone again, to plead that sacrifice in our behalf.*Christians do not sufficiently think of a living Savior: they dwell with pleasure on the thoughts of his death, but scarcely pay attention to the life which he is now spending in their service above*. But Paul teaches us to derive from this source more comfort and encouragement than any other; not even the death of Christ itself being so rich a source of consolation as this, [Romans 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.10); [Romans 8:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.34).

Reflect then on him in this view, as presenting his own blood before his Father in our behalf, and as asking for us a daily and hourly supply of all that we can stand in need of. Bear in mind, that you can be in no *difficulty*which he does not see; nor in any *danger*, from which he cannot save. And, as his care of you is perfect, so let your affiance in him be perfect also.

***~~3. With encouragement—~~***

What motive can any one have for an entire surrender of himself to God, like that which is here proposed to him? *Does Jesus live altogether for us in Heaven, and shall not we live altogether for him on earth?*Is not this reasonable, and our bounden duty? [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1). Dedicate, then, yourselves to him; and count no work too arduous to engage in for him, nor any sacrifice too great to make: It is but little that you can do for him, though your life were protracted to ever so great a length; but time is short and uncertain, therefore "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, [Ecclesiastes 9:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 9.10)."

***~~#2299~~***

***~~CHRIST, A SUITABLE HIGH-PRIEST~~***

***~~[Hebrews 7:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.26)~~***

"Such a high priest meets our need--one who is holy, blameless, undefiled, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens."

WITHOUT the Epistle to the Hebrews, we could never have understood the true scope of the Levitical law, much less its full accomplishment in the Lord Jesus Christ; we could never have ventured to trace such a correspondence between Melchizedek and Christ, or to lay such a stress on a variety of minute expressions in the prophetic writings as the Apostle does. And though we might easily have maintained the truth of our holy religion as founded on miracles and prophecies, we never could have silenced an unbelieving Jew so easily, as by the help of this epistle we are enabled to do.

The Apostle is here tracing the superiority of Christ and his priesthood—to all the priests, and their services, under the Levitical law. And, in the words before us, he observes that no person, but one endowed as Jesus was, would have been sufficient for the necessities of fallen man. In confirmation of this sentiment, I will show,

***~~I. What kind of a high-priest the Lord Jesus was—~~***

He is here compared with the high-priests under the law. Now, they were sinful creatures, like ourselves, [Hebrews 5:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.1-3); but of Jesus it is said,

***~~He was perfectly "holy"—~~***

In his own nature, he was "holy;"  
in the whole of his conduct, he was "innocent;"  
and though in the midst of an ensnaring and polluting world, he was "undefiled."

In no one act, word, or thought, did he ever, in the smallest degree, violate the perfect law of God. "In him was no sin! [1 John 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.5)."

***~~He was, in all respects, "separate from sinners"—~~***

In his very birth he was widely different from them: he came not into the world like other men: he derived not his human nature in a way of ordinary generation, but from the immediate hand of God. He was born of a pure virgin; and therefore, though born under the law, he was in no respect subject to the curse entailed on Adam's posterity for the violation of it: nor did he inherit the taint and pollution which is, of necessity, transmitted to all who in a natural way descend from him.

In his life, too, he was separate from them: for though he sojourned among them, and was continually holding the most intimate fellowship with them, he never, in any degree, imbibed their spirit. He was as pure as the light itself, which is incapable of contamination from the things among which it shines.

In his death, also, he was altogether separate from them: for he voluntarily gave up his life; as he showed, by speaking in a loud voice at the moment of surrendering up his soul to God, [Luke 23:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.46) with [John 10:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.17-18); and he died also as a victim, an expiation for sin, [Matthew 20:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 20.28).

***~~He was "higher than the heavens"—~~***

He was so previous to his incarnation. From all eternity was he "in the bosom of the Father, [John 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.18)," and "had a glory with him before all worlds, [John 17:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.24)." He was in a sense that the highest archangel never was, the Son of God, "his only-begotten Son, [Hebrews 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.5)," whom "all the angels of Heaven worshiped, [Hebrews 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.6)." He was "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)."

And subsequent to his death, also, was he exalted "far above all principalities, and powers, and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come, [Philippians 2:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.9-11). [Ephesians 1:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.20-21);" "for he rose again, and went into Heaven, and sat on the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him, [1 Peter 3:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.22)."

***~~In all these respects he was widely different from all the priests under the Levitical law—~~***

They were "taken from among their brethren," and "compassed with the same infirmities" as others; and "received honor from," rather than conferred honor upon, the office they sustained; and could execute it only during a few short years of their existence upon earth, [Hebrews 5:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.1-2); [Hebrews 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.4). Had Jesus in any of these respects resembled them, he would not have been a suitable High-priest for us.

To elucidate this, I will proceed to show,

***~~II. Why "such a high-priest alone befits us"—~~***

Had the Lord Jesus been an imperfect being, like the high-priests of old:

***~~1. He would have needed an offering for himself—~~***

The high-priests were forced to offer a sacrifice first for their own sins, before they could hope for any acceptance in what they would offer for the sins of others, [Hebrews 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.3). But this was unnecessary for Him, because there was no spot of sin found in him. And this is the very particular which the Apostle, in the words following my text, specifies, as resulting from His spotless character: "He needs not daily, as those high-priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's." *Having not the slightest imperfection of his own to atone for, he could atone for us, and intercede with God for us.*

***~~2. He would have had nothing that he could offer for us—~~***

He could not offer slain beasts, because he did not belong to the tribe to which this office was exclusively assigned. From the tribe of Judah he sprang: and "of that tribe nothing was said respecting priesthood, verse 13, 14." The law would have inflicted death upon him, if he had attempted to interfere with the duties of the Aaronic priesthood. As for his own body, he could not offer that; seeing it would have been polluted: and the law required that every sacrifice would be "without spot or blemish."

The paschal lamb was set apart four days before it was offered, on purpose that it might be thoroughly examined, so as to be found free from outward blemish: and, after it was slain, it was flayed, and laid open; so that the inwards also might be inspected, and be found perfect.

Now such an offering must our Lord present: but, if any imperfection cleaved to him, he could not. No such impediment, however, was found in him; so that he could offer himself to God, as "a Lamb without blemish and without spot, [1 Peter 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.19)."

***~~3. He would not have corresponded with his type, Melchizedek—~~***

He was to be "a Priest after the order of Melchizedek, verse 15, 17, 21." Now consider how great a man Melchizedek was: for even Abraham himself, and, in Abraham, all the Levitical priests also, offered tithes to him, confessing thereby their inferiority to him, verse 4-7. But, if Jesus was a mere man, he was inferior to Abraham, who, as being "the father" must be considered as the head, "of the faithful."

Being however such a one as we have before described, he was a worthy successor of Melchizedek. What Melchizedek was in a *shadow*, that was Jesus in *reality*, "King of righteousness, and King of peace; without father (as to his human nature), or mother (as to his divine nature), without descent (having no direct successor); having neither beginning of days, nor end of life, but abiding a Priest continually, verse 1-3."

***~~4. He would in no respect have answered to our necessities—~~***

All perfection must be in him, to enable him to atone for sin.

All power must be in him, to make that atonement effectual.

Had either the one or the other been lacking, he would not have been capable of fulfilling that high office: but, possessing all these requisites, he is accepted by the Father, and is "able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him! verse 25."

***~~Improvement~~***

Learn, then, from hence,

***~~1. What is the only means of acceptance with our God—~~***

Is there "a great High-priest over the house of God? [Hebrews 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.1)." We must go to God through him. We must not attempt to approach God, except through this appointed Mediator. To think of looking for acceptance through any works of our own, or of uniting any works of ours with his meritorious sacrifice, would be folly in the extreme. Even when the blood of beasts was presented in sacrifice, the offerer did not unite with it anything of his own: how much less, then, can we add anything to the sacrifice which our High-priest has offered!

Let not the thought enter into your heart; or, if it enters, let it be discarded with abhorrence: for there is no High-priest, but he; no sacrifice, but his; no other name given under Heaven, whereby any man can be saved, but the beloved, the honored, the adored name of Jesus! "Look to him, and you shall be saved, [Isaiah 45:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.22); look any where else, and you perish beyond a doubt.

***~~2. How blessed a thing it is to live under the Christian dispensation—~~***

Supposing a Jew were at this moment living at Jerusalem; and the temple were now standing, as richly furnished in every respect as in the days of Solomon. Suppose, too, that he had the cattle upon a thousand hills at his disposal; he could not offer unto God one acceptable sacrifice; because he could not find, upon the face of the whole earth, a Jew who could infallibly trace his pedigree to Aaron. If any other person would presume to officiate for him, in the place of the high-priest, he must instantly be put to death, [Ezra 2:62](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezra 2.62). Unhappy people! the only people upon the face of the whole earth, who are incapable of approaching God, in the way which they themselves think and believe to be right!

But, Christians, blessed are you; for you have a high-priest; and one, too, who is altogether *suited*to you, and *sufficient*for you. Rejoice in this and know your privilege: and, "having such a high-priest over the house of God," avail yourselves of the opportunity afforded to you, "drawing near to him with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having your hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and your bodies washed as with pure water: and hold fast the profession of your faith without wavering: for (all the promises of God are yours; and) He is faithful that "has promised! [Hebrews 10:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.21-23)."

***~~#2300~~***

***~~CHRIST THE MEDIATOR OF THE NEW COVENANT~~***

***~~[Hebrews 8:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.6)~~***

"But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises."

THE use of the Mosaic law is by no means sufficiently appreciated in the Christian world. The value of a map to travelers, or of a chart to one who navigates the trackless deep, is well known: but when God has given to us a graphic exhibition (if I may so speak) of every part of our road to Heaven, we never think of looking to it as the means of instruction to our souls. Yet one would think that, after the strict injunctions given to those who drew these maps, no one would be inattentive to them. The whole Mosaic law was intended to represent, in plain and visible characters, the way of life.

Hence, when *Moses*received his instructions from God relative to the *tabernacle*and all its vessels, he was ordered to take the utmost care not to deviate from them in the smallest matter, [Exodus 25:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 25.40). Of this the Apostle takes notice in the words preceding our text: 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 showed to you in the mount."

A similar direction was given to *David*also in reference to the *temple*which his son Solomon was to erect, [1 Chronicles 28:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 28.19).

But whence arose this extreme need of accuracy? The whole plan of salvation was laid in the divine mind; and the tabernacle and temple, with their vessels and their services, were intended to shadow it forth: and the smallest deviation from the model would have led to mistaken apprehensions about the way to life: it would either have kept back from man something which God designed to execute, or taught him to expect something which it was not God's intention to perform. But, the law being a perfect model of the whole spiritual building, the Gospel-edifice in all things corresponds with it; and thus reciprocally receiving and reflecting light, they mutually illustrate each other, and prepare the mind for a most accurate perception of the great mystery of redemption.

The point of which the Apostle is here speaking, is *the superiority of Christ's priesthood to that of Aaron*. Having dwelt upon it at some length, he recapitulates the subject, and gives as "the sum of" his observations, That Christ, our High-priest, is every way superior to the Levitical priests, since he is the Mediator of a better covenant, and, consequently, "has obtained a more excellent ministry than theirs."

To elucidate this important truth, I shall consider,

***~~I. The covenant of which Christ was the Mediator—~~***

It is spoken of in reference to another covenant to which it was superior. Let us inquire then:

***~~1. What is that other covenant?~~***

It is an "Old Covenant, which vanishes away, verse 13." In the Holy Scriptures we read of three covenants:

the Adamic covenant, that is, the covenant of WORKS;

the Abrahamic covenant, or covenant of GRACE; and

the Mosaic covenant made with the nation of ISRAEL, that was peculiar to them, and was not binding on any other people.

Now it is not with the *Adamic*covenant that the Christian covenant is compared, because that never waxes old nor vanishes away: it is at this hour as much in force as ever; and all who continue under it, will be dealt with according to it, until they take refuge in the covenant of grace, [Galatians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.10); [Galatians 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.3).

Neither is it the *Abrahamic*covenant with which the Christian covenant is compared; for they are, in fact, the same covenant, and differ only in the measure of light with which they are revealed. Nothing that is subsequent to the Abrahamic covenant has ever disannulled it, [Galatians 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.17); and consequently, inasmuch as it never vanishes away, it cannot be the one to which the Christian covenant is here said to be superior.

It remains then that the covenant with which the Christian covenant is compared, is that which God entered into with the Israelites in the wilderness. This was of a mixed nature: it was, in part, a covenant of works; and, in part, a covenant of grace. In as far as it promised manifold blessings to sincere though imperfect obedience, it was a covenant of grace; but in as far as it suspended those blessings altogether upon the performance of those works, it was a covenant of works. The full account of this covenant is given by Moses in the twenty-fourth chapter of Exodus. Compare [Exodus 24:3-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 24.3-8) with [Hebrews 9:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.19-21).

The Prophet Jeremiah contrasts Mosaic covenant with that New Covenant which God promised to make with his people under the Christian dispensation, [Jeremiah 31:31-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.31-34); and the Apostle, in the words following our text, expressly tells us, that it was of that covenant he spoke, when he said it was inferior to the Christian covenant and superseded by it, verse 8, 9. But,

***~~2. Wherein was the Christian covenant better than it?~~***

It was so in its own nature, being incomparably more liberal in its *terms*, more rich in its *provisions*, more permanent in its *duration*. The Mosaic covenant (as I will call it) granted nothing but in a way of remuneration for services performed: the Christian covenant grants everything upon the simple condition of our laying hold of the covenant, and asking for the blessing for Christ's sake.

The Mosaic covenant held forth only *temporal*benefits to those who were under it: but the Christian covenant imparts to the believer all the blessings both of *grace*and *glory*.

The Mosaic covenant waxed old and vanished away: the Christian covenant will endure for ever and ever!

It was so also in the promises with which it was established:

The possession of the promised land, with a long continuance of peace and plenty, was the chief promise of the Mosaic covenant. It is true, there were promises of pardon and acceptance through the offering of certain sacrifices: but the pardon did not bring peace unto the conscience; nor continue longer than until the next day of annual expiation; nor extend at all to sins of greater enormity, as adultery and murder.

But the Christian covenant purges away all sense of guilt from the conscience, and brings into the soul a peace that passes all understanding: it extends to every sin that man can commit; and assures the believer that be shall in due time possess all the glory of Heaven. There cannot be conceived any need that the believer can feel, or any circumstances under which he may feel it, but there are promises in the Christian covenant precisely suited to his situation, and commensurate with his necessities: and all are to be apprehended simply by faith. Even the repentance which is necessary to fit the soul for the reception of the blessings, and the faith that is to apprehend them, are comprehended within the promises: they are not required of us in order that other blessings may be bestowed as a reward for them; but they are promised to us, as means of introducing the soul to the possession of all other blessings. If we attempt to spin them, as it were, out of our own hearts, that we may be at rest in them, and make them a web whereby to catch other blessings, both they and we shall soon be swept away with the broom of destruction. But, if we go to God for them, then shall they be conferred upon us, and wrought in us by God as initiatory blessings, preparatory to the full bestowment of all the kingdom of Heaven.

How much better then this New covenant is than the Mosaic, must be obvious to the most superficial observer.

In order to a just understanding of the text, it will be proper yet further to inquire,

***~~3. In what sense is Christ "the Mediator of this better covenant?"~~***

Moses, in the first instance, and after him the Aaronic priests in succession, were the mediators of the Old Covenant. Everything was transacted by, and through, them. They offered the sacrifices, and carried in the blood of them before God, and offered incense before God in behalf of the people; and then went forth from God to bless the people.

So is the Lord Jesus Christ the Mediator of this better covenant. He is "the Daysman that lays his hand upon both parties, [Job 9:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.33)," and mediates between them. No man comes to God, but by him; nor does God grant his blessings to any man, but through him.

This part of our subject will be more fully opened, while we mark,

***~~II. The excellency of his priesthood as connected with it—~~***

To set forth this is the chief scope and aim of the Apostle in the whole context. And, to illustrate his subject, he points out,

***~~1. The superior dignity of his person—~~***

Christ is the true Melchizedek, the "King of righteousness and peace," without father (as it respected his human nature), without mother (as to his divine nature); having neither beginning of days, nor end of life, [Hebrews 7:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.1-3), "for from everlasting to everlasting he is God! [Psalm 90:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 90.2). [Proverbs 8:22-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 8.22-31)."

But the Aaronic priests were poor mortals like ourselves. Besides, the Aaronic priests were sinners, and needed first to offer sacrifices for their own sins, and then for the people's: but not so the Lord Jesus: "he knew no sin:" "he was without spot and blameless:" "he was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens," even "the Son of God who is consecrated for evermore! [Hebrews 7:26-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.26-28)."

***~~2. The transcendent excellency of his offering—~~***

The Mosaic priests offered nothing better than the blood of bulls and of goats: but the Lord Jesus offered his own immaculate body; yes, "he made his own soul an offering for sin! [Isaiah 53:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.10) with [Hebrews 9:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.11-12)." True, it was the manhood only that suffered; but his manhood, having "the Godhead dwelling in it bodily, [Colossians 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.9)," was of more value than all the cattle upon a thousand hills: it was a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the world, [1 John 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.2).

***~~3. The glory of the place where he ministers—~~***

The tabernacle where the Mosaic priests officiated was glorious, as being consecrated to such a holy use: but, as glorious as it was, "it had no glory by reason of the glory that excels," even of that heavenly "tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man. Compare [2 Corinthians 3:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.10-11), with, verse 1, 2." There Jesus is:  
not in a room darkened with a veil, but in the Heaven of heavens;  
not in the presence of a bright cloud, a mere symbol of the Deity—but in the immediate presence of God himself;  
not presenting the blood of beasts—but his own most precious blood, that was once shed on Calvary;  
not offering a cloud of incense—but pouring forth his own prevailing intercession;  
not bearing a breast-plate with the names of the twelve tribes—but bearing on his bosom the name of every individual of his elect;  
not appearing there for one people only—but for all the sinners of mankind;  
not obtaining mere temporal blessings, or spiritual blessings for a limited period—but spiritual and eternal blessings, even all that man can need, or God bestow;  
not coming forth, himself a sinner, delegated to pronounce a blessing—but "appearing without sin to confer by his own authority everlasting salvation" on all his believing people! [Hebrews 9:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.28).

Such are the views which the Apostle gives us of our great High-priest, and of "the transcendent excellence of his ministry."

***~~Judge then,~~***

***~~1. What is our duty towards this great High-priest—~~***

As "a minister of this New Covenant, [2 Corinthians 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.6), I hesitate not to say what MY duty is. It is:  
to make known this Savior to you in all his offices;  
to set before you this covenant in all its fullness, its freeness, its sufficiency, its immutability;  
to point Jesus out as the only Mediator of it, through whose sacrifice and intercession you must seek its blessings, and through whom alone you can obtain them;  
to open from time to time all the promises contained in it;  
and to lead you to a simple reliance on them, as the one only means of obtaining the accomplishment of them to your souls!

How inadequately they execute the ministerial office who dwell on the evidences of Christianity, or on morals to the exclusion of the sublimer subjects of the New Covenant.

What then is YOUR duty, but to:

Contemplate these subjects with admiration, and love, and gratitude; and to seek a personal interest in them all! Contemplate "the covenant," "ordered in all things, and sure;" and expect nothing but as the fruit of God's eternal love, as expressed towards you in that covenant.

Contemplate the peculiar *privileges*which you enjoy under this "better" covenant, above all that were ever enjoyed by God's people of old.

Contemplate *Jesus*as "the Mediator" of this covenant; and see all the conditions of it fulfilled by him for you, and all the blessings of it as the fruit of his sacrifice and intercession.

Contemplate the "*promises*" of it, so abundant, so suitable, so sufficient, so sure to all who plead them before God, and rely upon them as the only ground of their hopes.

In a word, look to the ministry of Christ, as the Jews did to that of their high-priests. They expected nothing but through the intervention of their appointed mediators: and in like manner you must expect nothing but in and through your adorable Advocate and Intercessor.

***~~2. The danger of neglecting this New Covenant—~~***

The generality of Christians lamentably neglect their duty in relation to our great High-priest. Instead of relying on that "better covenant," of which he is "the Mediator," they make covenants of their own precisely similar to the Mosaic covenant, which for its unprofitableness is abrogated and annulled, [Hebrews 7:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.18-19). They reduce the standard of the moral law to their own imagined ability to fulfill it: they look for the first motions to good to arise from themselves, from some imagined stock of which they imagine themselves possessed; and then expect ulterior blessings as a reward for their own personal merits and deserts.

They will be as little indebted to the free grace of God as possible: and, instead of receiving from the Lord Jesus Christ all their salvation as the fruit of what he has done and suffered for them, they give him no higher honor than that of obtaining for them a right and a power to save themselves. This is the covenant which they prefer, and for which they abandon that "better covenant," which God has revealed in his Gospel.

But let all such daring despisers of the Gospel hear what the Apostle Paul speaks to them in this epistle: "If," says he, "he who despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses, of how much more severe punishment, suppose you, 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! [Hebrews 10:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.28-29)."

Mark, this is not an assertion merely, but an appeal, an appeal to every considerate man: and, if you will only consider it candidly, I will consent that you shall be judges in your own cause: If you say, 'I am not guilty of the things here spoken of;' I ask, 'How is it possible to deny your guilt, if you are systematically rejecting the Christian covenant, and substituting another of your own? How can you be guiltless in respect to these things, when you thrust the Lord Jesus Christ from his mediatorial office, and seek to place his crown upon your own head? Beware, I beg you, of this fatal evil; for, "how shall you escape, if ye-neglect so great salvation? [Hebrews 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.3)." Remember, there is no other *covenant*whereby any human being can be saved; no *promise*, but what is contained in that; no *mediator*, through whom we can obtain a saving interest in it, but the Lord Jesus Christ. Lay hold on this covenant, and you are safe: reject it, and you perish forever!

***~~#2301~~***

***~~CHRIST ABOVE THE LEVITICAL PRIESTS~~***

***~~[Hebrews 9:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.11-12)~~***

"When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption."

THOUGH there are a multitude of types besides those which were instituted by Moses—yet the most direct and complete representations of Christ are certainly to be found in the Mosaic ritual. Amidst the various ordinances relative to the priests and the temple, there is perhaps not any one point, however minute, which has not a typical reference; though, for lack of an infallible instructor, we cannot precisely ascertain the meaning in every particular. The Epistle to the Hebrews, however, affords us great assistance in our inquiries into this subject, inasmuch as it declares the exact relation between the types and the one great Antitype in all the principal and most important points. The text especially, connected as it is with the whole preceding and following context, leads us to consider,

***~~I. The resemblance between Christ and the Aaronic priests—~~***

It would be endless to enumerate all the points of agreement between them: we shall rather confine our attention to those referred to in the text.

***~~1. The high-priests were taken from among men to mediate between God and them—~~***

This is expressly declared to be the end of their institution, [Hebrews 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.1). Aaron and his descendants were called to this office, [Hebrews 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.4); and, in all the transactions between the Israelites and their God, they performed that office according to the commandment.

Thus our blessed Lord was taken from among men; he was bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. He assumed our nature for that very purpose, that he might be capable of officiating as our great High-priest, [Hebrews 2:14-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.14-17), and, in that nature, he both comes from God to us, and goes to God from us.

***~~2. Their mediation was to be carried on by means of sacrifices—~~***

The precise method in which they were to execute their office is recorded in the 16th of Leviticus; nor could they deviate from it in the least. If any but the high-priest had presumed to enter within the veil, or he, on any other day than that of the annual atonement, or even then without the blood of the sacrifices, verse 7, he would have instantly been smitten, as a monument of Divine vengeance.

Thus Christ did not approach his God without a sacrifice, [Hebrews 8:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.3). He presented his own sacred body as an offering for sin; and, having "offered himself without spot to God," he has "gone with his own blood within the veil," and makes that blood the ground of his intercession on our behalf, verse 24 with the text.

***~~3. They obtained blessings for those on whose behalf they mediated—~~***

The judgments, which God had denounced against the transgressors of his law, were averted when the high-priest had presented the accustomed offerings, and God was reconciled to his offending people.

In like manner does Christ make reconciliation for us by the blood of his cross, [Colossians 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.20); He "gives his own life a ransom for us," and thus redeems us from those awful judgments which our sins have merited. Nor is it a mere deliverance from punishment that we obtain through him: "we are brought near to God by his blood," and are restored to the possession of our forfeited inheritance, [Ephesians 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.7); [Ephesians 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.11).

But while the text intimates the resemblance between Christ and the high-priests, it most unequivocally declares also,

***~~II. His pre-eminence above the Aaronic priests—~~***

This part of the subject also would open a large field for discussion: but, confining ourselves to the text, we shall notice his pre-eminence only in the particulars which are there specified.

***~~1. He officiated in a far nobler tabernacle—~~***

As he Jesus did not belong to the tribe to which the priesthood attached, he could not exercise his ministry within the precincts allotted to them, [Hebrews 7:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.13). The tabernacle therefore, in which he officiated, was his own body, while he continued upon earth; and the Heaven of heavens, when he ascended within the veil, [Hebrews 8:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.2). The "tabernacle" seems primarily to refer to his body. Compare [John 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.14) with [Colossians 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.9). But it may also relate to Heaven, since it certainly was a figure of that also, verse 24.

How infinitely does this exalt him above all the Aaronic priests! We allow that the Mosaic tabernacle was glorious: but what glory had it, when compared with Christ's immaculate body, in which, not a mere symbol only of the Divine presence dwelt, but all the fullness of the Godhead? And what was the holy of holies in comparison with Heaven itself, where Christ sits at the right hand of God? Surely in whichever light we view the tabernacle in which Christ officiated, we must acknowledge it to have been far "greater and more perfect than that which was made with hands."

***~~2. He offered a far more valuable sacrifice—~~***

The high-priests could offer nothing but the blood of beasts, which had not in itself the smallest efficacy towards the expiation of sin: the virtue, which it had, was wholly derived from its typical relation to the great Sacrifice.

But "Christ is entered into the holy place with his own blood;" and there presents it before God as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Compare the sacrifices then, the blood of goats and of calves, with the blood of our incarnate God. Who does not see the worthlessness of the one, and the infinite value of the other? No wonder that the former needed to be "offered year by year continually," since they had no power to take away sin, or to pacify an accusing conscience, verse 9; but the latter fully satisfies for the sins of the world, and, having been once offered, perfects for ever those who are sanctified by it, [1 John 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.2). [Hebrews 10:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.14).

***~~3. He obtained far richer benefits for his people—~~***

The utmost that the high-priest obtained for the people was, a remission of those civil or political penalties which were annexed to their several transgressions. But with respect to real pardon before God, the annual repetition of their sacrifices sufficiently manifested, that that was beyond the sphere of their influence, [Hebrews 10:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.1); [Hebrews 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.4); [Hebrews 10:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.11).

But Christ has obtained for us redemption from all the bitter consequences of sin; as well from the *sufferings*which we would have endured in the future world, as from the *bondage* to which we would have remained subject in this present life.

Nor are the effects of his sacrifice transient, like those under the law: it excels no less in the duration than in the greatness of the benefits it procures; it obtains for us, not redemption only, but "eternal redemption."

Well then may he be called "a High-priest of good things;" for there is nothing good in time or eternity, which he does not procure for those who seek a saving interest in his mediation.

***~~This subject may serve to show us,~~***

***~~1. What use to make of the Levitical law—~~***

If we read it merely as a system of rites and ceremonies, without considering the end of its institution, it will appear absurd, and utterly unworthy of its Divine Author. But, if we view it in its relation to Christ, it will appear beautiful and very instructive. There is no longer a veil over it with respect to us, [2 Corinthians 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.14); let us look at it therefore as at a mirror that reflects his glory; and we shall have no cause to regret the time and labor that we employ in exploring its mysterious contents.

***~~2. How to appreciate the blessings of redemption—~~***

We may form some judgment of them by meditating on the terrors of Hell, and the glories of Heaven. But there is nothing that can so fully reveal their value, as a consideration of the price Jesus paid for them.

Who can reflect on "the precious blood of Christ by which we are redeemed," and entertain low thoughts of the blessings purchased by it? Would men be so indifferent about salvation, if they thus considered how great it was? Surely, it would be impossible! As callous as the human heart is, it would melt into contrition at the sight of an expiring God! [Zechariah 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 12.10). Let us but habituate ourselves to such views as these, and neither earth nor Hell shall ever hold us in the bonds of sin. With such a sight of the *prize*, we shall never cease to run until we have obtained it!

***~~3. What grounds of hope there are for the very chief of sinners—~~***

Had any other price been paid for our redemption, many might have doubted whether it were sufficient for them: but who can doubt, when he knows that he has been bought with the precious blood of Christ?

This will expiate the foulest guilt! The difference that exists between one sinner and another, is lost, when we apply to Christ's infinitely meritorious atonement: its efficacy is the same, whatever degrees of guilt we may have contracted: it will avail for one as well as for another; nor is there any "sin of such a scarlet or crimson dye, but it shall be made white as snow," the very instant it is washed in this fountain: "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin!"

Let none then despair: let us rather consider what "a High-priest we have over the house of God;" and "come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help us in the time of need! [Hebrews 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.14); [Hebrews 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.16); [Hebrews 10:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.19-22)."

***~~#2302~~***

***~~THE JEWISH SACRIFICES TYPICAL OF CHRIST'S~~***

**[Hebrews 9:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.13-14)**

"The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!"

THE peculiar benefits of Christianity are usually displayed by contrasting our state with that of the heathen world: but they will be seen nearly to the same advantage, if we compare our privileges with those that were enjoyed under the Jewish dispensation. The Jews indeed had much that distinguished them above other nations: but *we possess in substance what they enjoyed only in the shadow*. One great object in the Epistle to the Hebrews is, to set this matter in a just point of view. This has been done with great perspicuity and strength of argument in the preceding context: and the author having shown that *we have a true, and eternal redemption obtained for us; while that accomplished by the Jewish ordinances was only typical and temporal*, states afresh, in few words, the grounds of his conclusion, and appeals to every intelligent reader for the justness of it.

In discoursing on his words we shall show,

***~~I. The excellence of the type—~~***

***~~The Jewish ordinances were altogether typical of Christ's sacrifice—~~***

The ordinances mentioned in the text, though similar, as means of purifying from pollution, were very different from each other as to the kind of pollution which they were intended to remove. The blood of bullocks and goats was offered annually on the great day of expiation, to atone for the moral guilt both of the priests and people, [Leviticus 16:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 16.6); [Leviticus 16:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 16.15). The ashes of the heifer, which, together with cedar, hyssop, and scarlet, had been burned outside the camp, were to be mixed with running water, and sprinkled upon a person who had contracted any ceremonial impurity (as from the touch of a grave, a corpse, a human bone, or anything that had been touched by an unclean person). On the third day, and on the seventh, they were to be sprinkled on him; and then he was to be esteemed clean, [Numbers 19:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 19.12).

***~~These were typical of Christ's sacrifice, by which the greatest sins may be forgiven; and without which, not even the smallest imaginable pollution can ever he purged away.~~***

***~~As types, these certainly were deserving of much regard—~~***

While they shadowed forth, and prepared men for, the Messiah that would come, they conveyed many real benefits to those who conformed to the rules which they prescribed. The penitents who bewailed their moral defilements, had their hopes of mercy and forgiveness revived and strengthened: and they who, on account of some ceremonial impurity, were separated for seven long days from the house of God, and from all fellowship with their dearest friends, were restored, as it were to the bosom of the Church, and to communion with their God. Doubtless these rites were burdensome; but everyone who valued the favor of God, and the blessings of social converse, would thankfully use the means which God had prescribed for the renewed enjoyment of them.

Nevertheless the things which were glorious in themselves, lost all their glory when contrasted with,

***~~II. The superior excellence of the antitype—~~***

As, by a type, we mean a shadowy representation of something future and substantial.

Just so, by an antitype, we mean that thing which corresponds to the type, and had before been represented by it, [1 Peter 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.21). The antitype then, or the thing that has been before represented, is, the sacrifice of Christ: and this infinitely excels all the ordinances by which it had been shadowed forth. The superior excellence of the antitype, Christ's sacrifice, appears particularly, in that:

***~~1. Christ's sacrifice purifies the conscience—~~***

The legal offerings never could remove guilt from the conscience, [Hebrews 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.9); they were mere remembrances of sins, [Hebrews 10:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.3-4); and the constant repetition of them showed that those, which had been before offered, had not availed for the full discharge of the persons who offered them, [Hebrews 10:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.2).

But the blood of Christ, once sprinkled on the conscience, "perfects for ever those who are sanctified, [Hebrews 10:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.10); [Hebrews 10:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.14)." No other atonement is then needed, or desired: the sinner needs only to exercise faith in that, and he will have peace in his soul, "being justified by faith, he shall have peace with God." How strongly does this mark the superiority which we ascribe to the sacrifice of Christ!

***~~2. Christ's sacrifice sanctifies the life—~~***

Though the Jewish ordinances availed for the restoration of men to the enjoyment of outward privileges, they never could renew and sanctify the heart. On the contrary, they rather tended to irritate the minds of men against both the law, and him who enjoined it.

But the blood of Christ sprinkled on the soul, instantly produces a visible change in the whole man: "the dead works" which were daily practiced, are now abandoned; and "the service of the living God," which before appeared irksome, is now its chief joy. It is undeniable that many in every place throughout the world (wherever the Gospel is preached) have undergone a very great change in all their views, desires, and pursuits; they have become dead to the things of time and sense, and have devoted themselves in body, soul, and spirit, to the service of their God.

Let the question be put to all of them: When did this change take place? There will be but one answer from them all: they will with one voice acknowledge, that it was effected by the sprinkling of the blood of Christ upon their hearts and consciences; that, until that blessed period, they were altogether carnal; and that from that time, they have been under the habitual influence of spiritual affections. What more can be lacking to establish the point before us?

The pre-eminence of Christ above the legal offerings will yet further appear, while we show,

***~~III. How it is that the transcendent worth of Christ's sacrifice may be inferred from the comparatively trifling value of the Jewish types—~~***

The Apostle's argument in the text is this: *If the Jewish sacrifices availed for the smallest good, then how much more will the sacrifice of Christ avail for the greatest possible good?*The force of this argument will appear by comparing,

***~~1. The nature of the offerings—~~***

The blood that was sprinkled on men under the law, was merely the blood of worthless beasts: but what is that which is sprinkled on us? Let the voice of inspiration answer this question: It was "GOD that purchased the Church with his own blood! [Acts 20:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.28)." Astonishing mystery! "the blood of Christ" was the blood, not of a mere man, but of one who was God as well as man! How plain is the inference in this view! Surely, if the blood of a beast, which was only externally "spotless," availed for anything, much more may the blood of Christ, that immaculate Lamb, avail for everything!

***~~2. The persons by whom they were offered—~~***

Under the law the offerings were presented by sinful men, who needed first to offer for their own sins, before they were permitted to offer for the people's.

But our sacrifice was offered by God himself:*Christ was both the sacrifice and the priest!*Yes, each person of the ever-blessed Trinity was engaged in this stupendous work:  
the *Father* was the person to whom the sacrifice was offered;  
*Christ* was the person who offered it;  
and the Eternal *Spirit* concurred and co-operated with him in this mysterious act.

Let then the offerings be compared in this view, and how infinite will the superiority of Christ's appear!

***~~3. The suitableness of each to the end proposed—~~***

What was there in the blood of bulls and goats that could wash away the stain of sin! How could that satisfy the Divine justice, or avert his wrath from sinful man? There was not the least affinity between the means and the end.

But Christ was "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh;" and he assumed our nature on purpose that he might stand in our place and stead. Here was a perfect suitableness between the means and the end.

Must the penalty due to sin be endured? He became a curse for us, and submitted to endure its just deserts.

Must the law be fulfilled and honored? He magnified it by his perfect obedience.

And being God as well as man, he was at liberty to do this for us; and his substitution in our place justly avails for our salvation. How plain then is the Apostle's inference when viewed in this light! Surely, when these considerations are all combined, there will be a strength in his argument, and a force in his appeal, which must bear down every objection, and fix the deepest conviction on our minds.

***~~This subject may further lead us to observe,~~***

***~~1. How manifest is the doctrine of the divinity of Christ!~~***

We need not look to any passages that confirm this doctrine by direct assertions; since in the text it is contained with yet stronger evidence in a way of implication.

Let it be supposed for one moment that Christ was a mere creature: how will the Apostle's argument then appear? If the blood of one creature avails for the obtaining of a mere shadowy and temporal benefit, how much more shall the blood of another creature avail for the obtaining of all that God himself can bestow? This were as absurd as to say, if a child can lift a feather, how much more can a grown person lift a mountain? Such an appeal would be unworthy of any man that pretends to common sense; and much more of an inspired Apostle.

But let the divinity of Christ be acknowledged, and the appeal is clear, convincing, incontrovertible.*Indeed the doctrines of the atonement and of the divinity of Christ are so interwoven with each other, that neither of them can be denied without effectually subverting both.* Let us seek then to be well established in these important truths.

***~~2. How necessary is it to trust entirely in Christ's atonement!~~***

It is not possible to state a case more strongly than this is stated in a chapter before referred to, Numbers 19. We cannot conceive less guilt to be contracted by any act than by unwittingly touching a thing, which, unknown to us, had been before touched by an unclean person: yet nothing but the sprinkling of the ashes of a red heifer could ever remove the impurity contracted by it. If the person that had contracted it were the holiest man on earth, and were to shed rivers of tears on account of what he had done, and increase his circumspection in the future a hundredfold, it would be all to no purpose; he must die as a defiler of God's sanctuary, if he did not use the purification which the law appointed.

How much more then must that soul perish which is not purified by the blood of Christ! How impossible is it that even the smallest sin would ever be expiated in any other way!*Let this then teach us to look unto Christ continually, and to have our consciences ever sprinkled with his precious blood*.

***~~3. How inseparable is the connection between faith and works!~~***

They greatly err, who think that the doctrines of faith are subversive to morality. The very faith that purges the conscience from guilt, purifies the life also from dead works, and animates us to serve the living God. Let this connection then be seen in our lives; so shall we most effectually remove the calumny; and "by well-doing put to silence the ignorance of foolish men!"

***~~#2303~~***

***~~NO REMISSION WITHOUT BLOOD~~***

***~~[Hebrews 9:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.22)~~***

"Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin."

THE external administration of religion has been extremely different in different ages of the world: but the method of acceptance with God has been invariably the same. Before the Mosaic ritual was formed, pardon was dispensed through the blood of sacrifices: and since it was abolished, men obtain mercy through that blood which the sacrifices both before and under the law were intended to prefigure.

To mark the correspondence between the sacrifices under the law, and that offered by Jesus on the cross, is the great scope of the Epistle to the Hebrews. In the preceding context it is observed that the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry were purged with blood; and then it is asserted as a universal truth, "that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin."

This assertion being of infinite importance, we shall:

***~~I. Establish it—~~***

***~~The observances of the ceremonial law show that men were saved by blood under the Mosaic dispensation—~~***

For every offense, sacrifices were to be offered according to the rank and quality of the offender: and whatever animals were sacrificed, whether bullocks, goats, lambs, or pigeons, they were to be slain, and their blood was to be sprinkled both on the altar, and on the offerer: and it was by the blood so sprinkled, that the offerer was cleansed from guilt. If a person were so poor that he could not bring a pair of young pigeons, he was at liberty to offer a measure (about five pints) of fine flour: a portion of which, answerably to the destruction of the beasts, was to be burned, in order to show the offender what he merited at the hands of God, [Leviticus 5:6-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 5.6-13).

There were indeed other purifications, some by fire, and others by water: but these were for ceremonial only, and never for moral defilement.

Thus the law, with the one exception above mentioned, spoke exactly the language of the text.

***~~The same way of salvation still obtains under the Gospel—~~***

***~~The typical sacrifices are indeed superseded by the one sacrifice of Christ. It is through his sacrifice, and through it alone, that any man is saved.~~***

***~~This is capable of direct proof from Scripture—~~***

The warning which Eli gave to his sons, when they poured contempt upon the sacrifices, and caused them to be abhorred by the people, not obscurely intimated, that acts of injustice towards men might be punished by the magistrate, and yet be forgiven through the great Sacrifice: but that, if any person poured contempt upon the sacrifices, he rejected the only means of salvation, and must therefore inevitably perish, [1 Samuel 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.17); [1 Samuel 2:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.25).

There is a yet stronger assertion to this effect in the chapter following the text, where it is said in the most express terms, that those who reject this Sacrifice have nothing to expect but wrath and fiery indignation, [Hebrews 10:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.26-27); which could not be true, if there were any other way of salvation provided for us.

***~~It may be yet further proved by arguments, which, though of an indirect nature, are not less satisfactory than the foregoing—~~***

If salvation be not by blood, the whole Mosaic ritual was absurd. For what end could so many innocent beasts be slaughtered, and consumed by fire, if it were not to prefigure the great Sacrifice? If they were intended to shadow forth the way of salvation through the sacrifice of Christ, there was abundant reason for such observances; and the lives of myriads of beasts were well bestowed in such a cause. But on any other supposition, the legal sacrifices, having no typical reference, were unworthy of God to institute, or of man to offer.

***~~If salvation is not by blood, the prophets grossly misrepresented their Messiah—~~***

Christ was spoken of as "making his soul an offering for sin;" as having "our iniquities laid upon him;" as "wounded for our transgressions," that he might "heal us by his stripes, [Isaiah 53:5-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.5-12);" it was foretold that he would "be cut off; but not for himself;" that he would "finish transgression, make reconciliation for iniquity, make an end of sin, and bring in an everlasting righteousness, [Daniel 9:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 9.24); [Daniel 9:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 9.26)." Yes, he was prophesied of as "a fountain that would be opened for sin and for impurity [Zechariah 13:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 13.1);" and John, who was more than a prophet, pointed him out as that very Lamb of God, that would take away the sins of the world, [John 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.29). Now what can be the meaning of these passages? how are they applicable to Christ, if they do not mark out his atonement? and what truth is there in such representations, if we are not to seek remission through his atoning blood?

***~~If salvation is not by blood, the declarations of the Apostles, yes, and of Christ himself, are far more likely to mislead, than to instruct the world—~~***

Christ expressly told his disciples, that his "blood was shed for the remission of sins, [Matthew 26:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.28)." And the Apostles uniformly declare, that God purchased the Church with his own blood [Acts 20:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.28); that our reconciliation to God, [Ephesians 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.16). [Colossians 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.20), and our justification before him, [Romans 5:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.9), together with our complete redemption, [Ephesians 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.7). [Revelation 5:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.9)—are by blood, even by the blood of Christ, that spotless Lamb, [1 Peter 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.19). Is this the way to teach men that they shall be saved by their works? Must we not utterly despair of understanding anything they have said, if we are not to expect salvation by the blood of Christ?

The Apostle's assertion being thus fully established, we shall,

***~~II. Improve it—~~***

The death of Christ has an aspect upon everything that relates to our souls.

But not to enumerate many points, let us reflect on:

***~~1. The evil of sin—~~***

We are assured that not one sin could have been forgiven without shedding of blood. Nor was it the blood of bulls and of goats only that was necessary, but the blood of God's dear Son, even of Jehovah's Fellow.*What then must sin be, that required such a sacrifice!*We behold the evil of sin:  
in the miseries that are in the world;  
and still more in the torments of the damned;  
but most of all do we see its malignity in the sufferings of the Son of God; without which not the smallest transgression could ever have been expiated. Let us then view sin in this light, and we shall no more account it a small and trivial evil.

***~~2. The folly of self-righteousness—~~***

Self-righteousness consists in *substituting*something of our own in the place of the atonement, or in *blending*something of our own with it. In either case we utterly make void the death of Christ, [Galatians 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.21). And what madness is this! It is, in fact, to shut ourselves out from all hope of pardon, and to rivet our sins upon our souls forever!

It may be thought indeed that Christ died to purchase us a right and power to save ourselves by our works. But if this was the case, why did Paul impute the rejection of his own nation to their going about to establish their own righteousness, [Romans 9:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.31-32); [Romans 10:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.3). And why did he desire to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, [Philippians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.9). Why did he declare that if any man were circumcised with a view to obtain justification by the law, Christ would profit him nothing, [Galatians 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.2); [Galatians 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.4). Why did he contrast salvation by grace, and salvation by works, so as to show that they could not be blended or consist together, [Romans 11:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.6). This alas! is a refuge of lies, which, together with all who flee to it, will be swept away with the broom of destruction!

Let us not then dare to put ourselves in that way wherein God declares there is no remission.

***~~3. The encouragement which the Gospel affords to sinners—~~***

When it is said that "without the shedding of blood there is no remission," it is doubtless implied, that through shedding of blood there is remission of sin! And what a glorious truth is this! How refreshing to the weary soul! Let it be contemplated with holy joy and wonder. There is no sin, however great, from which the blood of Christ will not cleanse the soul! [1 John 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.7). David, after contracting the foulest guilt, was yet able to say, "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). Let every one then go to the fountain opened for sin; let him plunge, as it were, beneath that sacred flood; and he shall instantly become pure and spotless in the sight of God! [Ephesians 5:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.25); [Ephesians 5:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.27)."

***~~4. The wonderful love of Christ—~~***

He knew that sin could not be forgiven, unless he would take upon him our nature and make atonement for us by his own blood. And rather than leave us to perish as the fallen angels, he accepted the hard conditions, left the bosom of his Father, put himself in our place, and submitted to endure the penalty due to sin.

O what transcendent love! How inconceivable its heights, how unsearchable its depths! [Ephesians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.18-19). Let our minds dwell upon it continually; that our hearts being warmed with this mysterious, incomprehensible love, we may be ever vying with the hosts of Heaven in singing, "To him who loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, be glory and dominion for ever and ever! [Revelation 1:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.5-6).

***~~#2304~~***

***~~USE OF TYPICAL PURIFICATIONS~~***

***~~[Hebrews 9:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.23)~~***

"It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these."

The scope of the whole chapter is clear: it is intended to show, that, *while the sacrifice of Christ was shadowed forth by the Levitical sacrifices, it was infinitely superior to them all*.

I will show from it,

***~~Whence arose a necessity for typical purifications—~~***

Doubtless, the necessity arose, primarily, from the mere arbitrary appointment of God, who had commanded them to be made. But, subordinate to that, there were other, and most important, reasons too for these ordinances: for by purifying everything with blood:  
God first showed to his people their extreme need of mercy;  
next, He shadowed forth to them the mercy which he had in reserve for them;  
lastly, He confirmed their expectation of that mercy in his appointed time.

What could a sinner think, when he understood that the very altar of God itself, yes, and the most holy place, the immediate residence of the Deity, needed to be purified with blood, because they were defiled by their use in the service of man? *Must he not feel that his depravity was extreme, when his very best services were so polluted*, that not only must they be purified with blood, but the very altar, on which his offerings were laid, and the sanctuary itself also, into which the blood of them was carried, must be purged with blood also? Truly these ordinances were a daily source of the deepest humiliation to every soul among them.

But knowing, as of necessity they must, that these ordinances were only "shadows of good things to come, [Hebrews 10:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.1)," they would look forward to a better sacrifice, which would in due time be offered. They would see that remission of sins can be obtained through blood alone, through the blood of an innocent victim shed in their place and stead, and through the sprinkling of that blood upon their souls.

And by the daily repetition of the same ordinances, they must be constantly reminded of God's gracious purposes towards them; and be assured that he would, in due time, accomplish all that he had promised.

Thus were the typical purifications necessary in their place.

But it was not in the patterns only of heavenly things that there existed a need of purification, but "in the heavenly things themselves." I must therefore proceed to show,

***~~II. What necessity there is for purification in the things typified—~~***

***~~Under the New Covenant, no less than under the Old Covenant, must everything be purified with blood—~~***

Our persons are altogether polluted and defiled: our *bodies*are a mass of corruption, and our *souls*are a sink of iniquity! There is no abomination that sin has brought into the world, but the soul is the very womb in which it is generated, or rather the fountain from whence it flows, as its proper and perennial source. How can such a creature find acceptance with a holy God, if there is not found some blood capable of purifying him from guilt, and some water capable of cleansing him from his inherent defilements?

Our services also must, of necessity, partake of all this defilement: for "who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" Truly, as our common actions in life need purification; so do our very tears need to be washed, and our repentances to be repented of.

But of "the heavenly things" spoken of in my text, Heaven itself is the principal: for it is that which was typified by the most holy place; it is that of which the sanctuary was intended to be a "pattern." And does that need purification? Yes, it does: nor could God himself endure it as a residence, so to speak, if it were not cleansed from the defilement it contracts by the introduction of sinners into it. Therefore, as the high-priest sprinkled the sanctuary with blood; so does our great High-priest, who "has entered into Heaven, with his own blood, verse 12," sprinkle and purify that holy place, and thus "prepare it as a mansion for his believing people, [John 14:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.2-3).

***~~But for this end there must be a better sacrifice than any that were offered under the law—~~***

The blood of beasts might suffice to cleanse men from *ceremonial*defilement: but it could never avail for the cleansing of *moral guilt*in any one particular: no, "it was not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats would take away sin! [Hebrews 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.4)." To effect that was beyond the power of any created being.

Had the first archangel assumed our nature for that end, he would have failed in the attempt. To so great a work none but God himself was competent: and God himself must become a man, and shed his own blood for us, before one single sin can be blotted out from the book of God's remembrance, or one of our fallen race be able to present to God one acceptable service. All that was shadowed forth under the law, must actually be fulfilled. The Son of the living God:  
must take upon him our nature;  
must die as an atonement for sin;  
must enter into Heaven with his own blood;  
must sprinkle that blood upon and before the mercy-seat;  
must sprinkle us also, even every man who shall ever be savingly interested in his atonement: even the covenant itself, too, must he sprinkle with his blood, in order to its ratification before God, and its application to our souls.

All this, I say, must be done, in order to the admission of any human being to the realms of bliss. It is all necessary for God's honor; for no less a sacrifice than this would satisfy his justice: and it is all equally necessary for our happiness; since nothing less can bring peace into our consciences, or operate with a transforming efficacy on our souls!

As the patterns then of these things needed a purification by the blood of beasts—so do the things typified need to be purged by the blood of our incarnate God.

***~~Let us, then, learn from these things,~~***

***~~1. The need we all have of the Covenant of Grace—~~***

God, as you know, has made a covenant with us. And this covenant we must receive. We must, as all Israel did, declare our consent to it, and engage to look for life on the terms which it prescribes. Paul says, "This is the blood of the covenant which God has enjoined unto you." If God had only offered it as a gift, methinks no sinner in the universe would have hesitated to accept it: but God enjoins it with authority; and declares, that on no other terms whatever shall any sinner ever find acceptance with him.

Accept, then, this covenant. Do not think to make covenants of your own, whereby to secure some glory to yourselves: for you may be assured that God will never agree to any other, than that which he has proposed, and his only dear Son has ratified. The Israelites were not left to modify the covenant after their own taste; but were required to accept that which was given them of the Lord. So is there no other alternative for you, but to accept or reject the covenant of grace. In this covenant God gives all, and you receive all.

For what could you do to recommend either your persons or your services to God? If you were to shed rivers of tears, you could never wash away so much as one sin: nor, whatever efforts you might make, could you ever offer one single service, which would stand the test of God's law, and defy the eye of Omniscience to discern a flaw in it. I say again, therefore, lay hold on this covenant; and look for all its blessings, as the free gift of God for Christ's sake.

***~~2. The way in which we may become partakers of it—~~***

You have already seen how Moses sprinkled all the people with the blood of the sacrifice: and by that sprinkling were they all made partakers of it—and in the same way must you also become partakers of the covenant of grace. Paul tells us, that to this sprinkling of blood every believer comes, [Hebrews 12:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.24); and Peter tells us, that by it every believer is saved, [1 Peter 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.2). In truth, as it was the shedding of the blood of Christ that satisfied the Divine Majesty, and ratified the covenant; so *it is the sprinkling of that blood on our hearts and consciences that can alone entitle us to its benefits*.

But, in relation to this matter, there is a very important difference between the Israelites and us. They were sprinkled in the persons of their representatives: but we must be sprinkled in our own persons: nothing among us can be done by proxy. We must ourselves dip the scarlet wool and hyssop, so to speak, in the blood of our great Sacrifice; and by faith must sprinkle it on our own hearts and consciences. Yes, we must daily sprinkle with it both our persons and our services, and look for Heaven as prepared for us by it, that we may to all eternity sing, "To Him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood!" "The sacrifice of Christ was unto God of a sweet-smelling savor, [Ephesians 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.2);" let it be so to us also; and all that has been purchased by it shall be ours.

***~~#2305~~***

***~~THE HOLY OF HOLIES, A TYPE~~***

**[Hebrews 9:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.24)**

"For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered Heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence."

IT appears, at first sight, unworthy of God to appoint with such precision all the minutest circumstances relating to the tabernacle and its services. Provided he were worshiped and served, it would seem a matter of no importance whether the *place*wherein he was worshiped, were of such or such an exact form, or whether the *ceremonies*observed in his worship were exactly of such or such a kind.

But God intended to prefigure everything relating to the Messiah and his kingdom: and therefore it was necessary not only that a model of everything would be given to Moses, [Hebrews 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.5), but that these patterns of heavenly things, made by Moses according to that model, would undergo a purification by the blood of carnal sacrifices, so that the heavenly things themselves, which were to be purified by the great Sacrifice, might be the more evidently prefigured, verse 23.

These types having been given, Christ accomplished them on earth in part, and is now perfecting the accomplishment of them in Heaven; where he is gone, as the high-priests went into the holy of holies, to appear before God on behalf of his people.

It is our intention to show:

***~~I. In what respect Heaven was typified by the holy of holies—~~***

The whole edifice of the tabernacle or temple was a figure of Christ's human nature, in which the God-head dwelt; and of the Church also, in which God resides, [John 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.19); [John 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.21). [1 Corinthians 3:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.16-17). But the most holy place, which is also called "the tabernacle, verse 3," eminently represented Heaven:

***~~1. It was the immediate residence of the Deity—~~***

The Shechinah, the bright cloud, which was the symbol of the Deity, dwelt between the cherubim upon the mercy-seat; and there God manifested himself more than in any other place on earth, [Exodus 25:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 25.22). Thus also, but in an infinitely brighter manner, does he display his glory in Heaven. He is indeed on earth and even in Hell; neither can the Heaven of heavens contain him; for he pervades all space. But, though he is on our right hand, we cannot see him; nor, if we look for him on the left hand, can he be found by us, [Job 23:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 23.8-9). But in Heaven he is seen face to face; and all the heavenly hosts behold him shining forth in all the brightness of his glory.

***~~2. It was inaccessible, except with the blood of sacrifices—~~***

No person whatever was to enter into the sanctuary, except the high-priest; nor could he enter except on the great day of annual expiation; nor even then, except with the blood of beasts, that had been offered in sacrifice to God, verse 7.

"Not without blood." Thus is there no admittance into Heaven but through the blood of our great Sacrifice. Not even our great High-priest himself, when he had become the Surety and Substitute of sinners, could enter there without his own precious blood, verse 12; and Heaven itself needed, as it were, to be purified from the defilement it contracted through the admission of sinners into it, even as the sanctuary, with all the vessels of it, were purified from the pollutions they had contracted through the ministry of sinful man, verse 21, 23 with [Leviticus 16:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 16.16).

***~~3. It was the repository of all the principal memorials of God's power and grace—~~***

The Apostle enumerates the various things which were deposited in the holy of holies, verse 4, 5. The Apostle does not say that the censer, or altar of incense, was in the holy of holies (for it was on the outside of the veil), but that the holy of holies had it: that being of very distinguished use, when the high-priest entered within the veil; all of them, either memorials of God's providential care, or exhibitions of his covenant love.

And are they not all in Heaven, concentrated and combined in the person of Christ? Christ is the true ark, in which the law is kept, and fulfilled: and, while he makes intercession for his people, he is also the food of their souls, and the performer of all those miracles of grace that are wrought on their behalf. We cannot behold him, but we must immediately be persuaded that *God is able and willing to accomplish for us all that our necessities may require*.

But while we see that the true tabernacle, even Heaven itself, was prefigured by the holy places made with hands, let us consider,

***~~II. The end for which our Lord ascended there—~~***

Our Lord could not go into the earthly tabernacle, because he was not of that tribe to which the priesthood belonged: but into the heavenly sanctuary he went:

***~~1. As our Forerunner—~~***

God has ordained, that all his people would one day dwell with him around his throne. All true penitents now are priests unto God, whether they are Jews or Gentiles, male or female, [Revelation 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.6); and Jesus is gone, as he himself tells us, to prepare places for them, [John 14:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.2-3). He is expressly said to be gone within the veil as our Forerunner, [Hebrews 6:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.20). Let us then contemplate him in this view; and look forward to the time when we shall follow him within the veil, and "be presented faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy."

***~~2. As our Head and Representative—~~***

It was not as an individual merely that Christ ascended into Heaven, but as *the Head and Representative of his redeemed people. All that he did and suffered was in their place and stead*. Hence they are said to be "*circumcised*in him," and to be "*buried*with him in baptism," and "*crucified*with him." In the same capacity also he went within the veil, to appear in the presence of God for us. Hence we are said to be "risen with him," yes, to be already "sitting with him in heavenly places! [Ephesians 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.6)." And on this our hope greatly depends: for, because "our life is hidden with Christ in God, we may be assured that, when he shall appear, we also shall appear with him in glory! [Colossians 3:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.3-4)."

***~~3. As our Advocate and High-priest—~~***

It is in this view that the Apostle principally speaks of him in the text. The end for which the high-priest entered into the typical sanctuary, was, to present the blood of the sacrifice, and to cover the mercy-seat with the clouds of incense. It was precisely thus that Jesus went into the Heaven of heavens for us. He is gone to present his own blood before the throne of God, and to plead the merit of that blood on behalf of sinful men. And it is on this very account that he is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him, namely, because he ever lives to make intercession for them, [Hebrews 7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.25).

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How excellent is the Gospel salvation!~~***

The *Mosaic*economy was excellent in comparison with the state of heathen, because it provided a way of acceptance with God, a way, too, that was of divine appointment. But the Gospel points out to us:  
a far greater Priest,  
officiating in a nobler tabernacle,  
presenting an infinitely richer sacrifice,  
and offering a more powerful intercession on our behalf!

Let us then value this Gospel, and search into its contents, and seek its blessings with our whole hearts.

***~~2. What encouragement have all to embrace and to hold fast this Gospel!~~***

Were anything lacking to complete the work of salvation for us, we might well hesitate before we embraced the overtures of the Gospel. But a view of Christ as our High-priest dissipates our fears, and encourages both the weakest and the vilest to come to God through him. "If any man sins," says the Apostle, "we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who is also the atoning sacrifice for our sins! [1 John 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.2)." Again it is said, "Seeing we have a great High-priest who has passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession, [Hebrews 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.14);" and again, "Having boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, and having a high-priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, [Hebrews 9:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.19); [Hebrews 9:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.21-22)." Let us then make this improvement of the subject; so shall we, each in his appointed order, appear before God for ourselves, and dwell in his immediate presence for ever and ever!

***~~#2306~~***

***~~CHRIST'S APPEARANCE TO TAKE AWAY SIN~~***

***~~[Hebrews 9:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.26)~~***

"Now once, in the end of the world, has he appeared, to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."

TO obtain a just knowledge of the Gospel, we should view it in its connection with the law; partly, in a way of comparison; and partly, in a way of contrast. From the comparison, we shall ascertain its nature: from the contrast, we shall learn its excellency.

*Compare*the Gospel it with the law; and you will find that it agrees with the law, as the seal with the impression on the wax: there is not the smallest feature in the law, to which there will not be found a corresponding lineament in the Gospel.

In *contrast*, there are in the Gospel points which the law could by no means exhibit.

Its priests were men, who needed first to offer for themselves. They officiated in an earthly tabernacle; and presented only beasts, for offerings; and presented them often, on account of their inefficacy to expiate the sins of men.

But the High-priest under the Gospel is no other than God himself; who, having assumed our nature, offered his own body, once for all; and is entered into Heaven itself, there to carry on and perfect his work for all who come to God through him. It is in this view that the Lord Jesus Christ is spoken of in the passage before us. He is contrasted with the priests under the law, as "not having entered, like them, into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into Heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us:" and as "not offering himself often, as the high-priest entered into the holy place every year, with blood of others; for then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world. But now once, in the end of the world, has he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."

From these words I shall take occasion to show:

***~~I. The insufficiency of the Mosaic sacrifices—~~***

By "the end of the world," we are to understand, the end of the Mosaic dispensation. That period is called the Fullness of Times, [Galatians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.4). [Ephesians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.10); and the Last Days, [Hebrews 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.2). [1 Peter 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.20); and the Ends of the World, [1 Corinthians 10:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.11). During that period, sacrifices were offered. But they were insufficient for the removal of sin.

***~~1. The Old Testament sacrifices had not in themselves any suitableness to take away sin—~~***

What virtue could there be in the blood of bulls and of goats? "It was not possible for them to take away sin [Hebrews 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.4)."

**2.** **The Old Testament sacrifices were not ordained of God to take away sin—**

They were intended only to prefigure Christ; and to direct the eyes of men to him, and to keep up the expectation of him in the world, [Hebrews 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.5).

**3.** **The very repetition of the Old Testament sacrifices was an acknowledgment of this—**

Had they fully expiated sin, there would have been no occasion for the repetition of them; and "they would therefore, of course, have ceased to be offered, [Hebrews 10:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.1-2)."

In contrast with them, we here behold:

***~~II. The perfection of the Christian Sacrifice—~~***

"To put away sin, the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world."

***~~He was a proper sacrifice for sin—~~***

He was altogether spotless, both in body and soul, [1 John 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.5). In him, therefore, there was both a suitableness for a sacrifice, and sufficiency to make atonement for sin: a suitableness, because he was a partaker of our nature; and a sufficiency, because he was a partaker also of the divine nature. On him the iniquities of the world were laid, [Isaiah 53:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.6); and under the curse due to them he died, [Galatians 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.13).

***~~By his one offering of himself, he effected what the Mosaic sacrifices never could—~~***

He put away sin from before God, "who is reconciled to us through the blood of the cross, [Colossians 1:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.21-22);" and he put it away also from man, both in its guilt and power. So did he cancel the guilt of men, that "all who believe in him are justified from all things, [Acts 13:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.39);" and so did he break its power, that it never can have dominion over one of his redeemed people, [Romans 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.14).

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How highly privileged are we who live in the present age!~~***

We have not to present to God those poor and worthless sacrifices which left the conscience still burdened with guilt, verse 9; but can plead one which is a sufficient atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world, [1 John 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.2), and "perfects for ever all those who are sanctified, [Hebrews 10:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.14)."

***~~2. What foolishness are they guilty of, who hold fast their sins!~~***

Think what has been done to deliver us from them. God has laid them all upon his only-begotten Son, that they might be "put away from us, as far as the east is from the west." But, in holding them fast, we say, in fact, "You shall never wash my soul, [John 13:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.8);" I regard not your tender mercies: I prefer my sinful gratifications before all that you can do for me; and I will have them, in despite of all that you have threatened to do against me."

Say, beloved, what will be your views of this conduct, in a short time? May the Lord grant, that, before it be too late, you may believe in Christ; lest "the corner-stone, which you so ungratefully reject, would fall upon you, and grind you to powder!"

***~~#2307~~***

***~~CHRIST'S SECOND COMING~~***

***~~[Hebrews 9:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.27-28)~~***

"Just as man is appointed to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him."

IT is probable that many in the first ages of Christianity wondered, as indeed many even at this time do, how persons would be saved by the death of Christ, thousands of years before he came into the world; more especially since the most solemn sacrifices under the Jewish economy were of no effect beyond the year in which they were offered. But the Jewish sacrifices needed to be repeated, because they were worthless and inefficient: whereas *the perfection of Christ's sacrifice gave it a retrospective and prospective efficacy, so that, at whatever period of the world it would be offered, it needed never to be repeated*. This is the scope of the passage before us; and the Apostle illustrates his argument by a solemn and acknowledged truth. To comprehend the force of his observations, we must consider,

***~~I. Man's destination to death and judgment—~~***

***~~Every man must die—~~***

This is too obvious to need a proof. Whatever be our age, condition, pursuits, and prospects—we must die. If our life were protracted to the age of Methuselah—we must die at last. God has "appointed" it; nor shall his decree be either defeated or reversed. But it is only "once" that we can die. Though some few who have been miraculously restored to life, have died a second time, we must not expect to return from our graves. If the great work of salvation is not completed before we die, we shall be undone for ever! [Ecclesiastes 9:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 9.10).

***~~After death we shall all be judged—~~***

God has appointed a day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness, and reward every man according to his works. And this also shall be but "once:" for, though every man's state is fixed as soon as he goes into the invisible world, it is not until the general resurrection that his body shall participate in the portion assigned to his soul. And, as there is no return from death to another state of probation, so there is no appeal from the sentence that shall be passed in that day.

The Apostle having mentioned this, proceeds to state,

***~~II. A similar appointment respecting Christ—~~***

***~~Christ "once" died for the sins of men—~~***

Though in appearance our Savior died like other men—yet in reality his death was altogether different from theirs. He died as a sacrifice for sin: his death was that very atonement which had been typically represented from the beginning of the world. But though he was to be "an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world," he died only "once." *The legal sacrifices were constantly repeated, because they were rather "remembrances of sins" than a real expiation of them*. But "he, by one offering of himself, has perfected for ever those who are sanctified, [Hebrews 10:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.14);" and "many," even all that believe in him, have their sins removed for ever by virtue of it.

***~~He also will "appear a second time" at the day of judgment—~~***

At his first coming he appeared "in the likeness of sinful flesh, [Romans 8:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.3)," and was treated as a sinner both by God and man: but at his second coming he will assume a very different appearance. As the high-priest, while offering the annual sacrifices, was clothed only in plain linen garments, but when he had completed his sacrifice, he came forth in his splendid robes to bless the people, [Leviticus 16:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 16.23-24) with 8:7, 9 and [Numbers 6:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 6.23-24); so our great High-priest will take off the garb of humiliation, and shine forth in all his majesty and glory [Matthew 25:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.31). At his first coming, he saved not himself; but, at that day, he will impart "salvation" unto others, even to all who seek him in sincerity and truth.

The Apostle having introduced God's appointment respecting man to illustrate that respecting Christ, we shall point out,

***~~III. The correspondence and connection between them—~~***

The mention of death and judgment as appointed unto man was not at all necessary to the Apostle's argument: but, as an illustration of it, it was very pertinent.

***~~1. Death and judgment are the consequences of sin; and the first and second coming of Christ shall be the means of salvation.~~***

If there had been no sin, there would have been no death, nor any occasion for a day of judgment: and, if Christ had not come to bear the sins of men, there would have been no salvation: all must have inevitably and eternally perished. Moreover, as the law required that the High-priest, after having finished his work within the veil, would come forth to bless the people; so in the Divine appointment, Christ's second coming is necessary to the complete salvation of his followers.

***~~2. Death and judgment shall be fatal to unbelievers; and the first and second coming of Christ shall be the means of salvation to them that believe—~~***

The Lord Jesus, as a Judge, will condemn the wicked, "he will come to take vengeance on those who know not God, and that obey not his Gospel." But as a Priest, he will come forth only to bless his redeemed, who are praying without, while he is interceding for them within the veil, [Luke 1:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.9-10). They are fitly represented as "looking for him;" and he will appear to their unutterable and eternal joy.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. To those who are regardless of their spiritual welfare—~~***

O that you would duly consider the certainty and nearness of death and judgment! You would then soon turn from vanity and sin, and labor to secure a saving interest in Christ. Let this subject then dwell upon your minds, until you are quickened by it to seek the Lord, and have obtained through him the remission of your sins.

***~~2. To those who are anxious to save their souls—~~***

If you really look to Christ to take away your sins, you need not be afraid of death and judgment. You may look forward to Christ's second coming, not with comfort only, but unspeakable delight. Stand then in this posture, looking for and hastening to that blessed day, [2 Peter 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.12). If he tarries, wait for him; and in due time you shall hear from his lips that reviving sentence, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world!"

***~~#2308~~***

***~~SEASONS OF PENITENCE RECOMMENDED~~***

***~~[Hebrews 10:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.1-4)~~***

"The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming--not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins."

IN the institutions of the Mosaic law, as burdensome as they were, God consulted the best interests of his people. Repentance, faith, and obedience, were inculcated in them all. The daily sacrifices and frequent ablutions were intended to show them that they stood in need of mercy and of spiritual renovation: and the authority with which they were enjoined, taught them, that their whole happiness depended on an entire submission to the will of God.

Those ordinances had also a further use; which was to lead the minds of all to the contemplation of mysteries, which would in due season be more fully revealed. Those ordinances did not themselves convey any solid or lasting benefit: they were mere *shadows*, which indicated indeed a substance; but which would vanish away, when that substance would appear. This is the view given of the law in the passage before us.

Hence it appears that the most solemn institutions of the law, not excepting the sacrifices offered on the great day of annual expiation, were, in fact, no more than mere "remembrances of sins," which could never be removed, but by that better sacrifice which would in due time be offered.

But that we may have a fuller insight into this subject, I will endeavor more distinctly to show:

***~~I. For what end those annual remembrances of sins were enjoined—~~***

Doubtless they were intended, as the whole of the Mosaic ritual also was, to separate the Jewish people more entirely from all the nations of the world. But they were more particularly designed,

***~~1. To make them sensible of their need of a Savior—~~***

Every offering had this tendency: no man could see his victim bleed, without seeing and acknowledging what was his own desert before God. But, if there had been no day of annual expiation appointed, the people would have been ready to imagine that every offering which they had presented to God had actually taken away the sin for which it had been offered. To guard against this fatal error, a day was appointed annually for a more especial remembrance of their sins, and for a deeper humiliation of their souls before God on account of them. Thus they were taught that neither their repentances nor their sacrifices had really availed to put away their sins: for, if they had, there had been no occasion for a repetition of them.

Moreover, the same ordinances being still appointed annually, and annually observed, they were made to feel that not even these more solemn rites had been able to prevail for the expiation of sin; so that, in fact, the guilt contracted throughout their whole lives still abode upon their souls; no offerings which they had ever presented, having been able to remove it.

In the view of this, they were particularly required to "afflict their souls, [Leviticus 16:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 16.29); [Leviticus 16:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 16.31)." And, in truth, this ordinance was well calculated to produce in them the deepest humiliation: for, having occasion every year to review their lives through the past year; and to add, as it were, the sum of their recent iniquities to the incalculable score that was against them in consequence of former transgressions; and being at the same time necessitated to see that nothing which they either had done, or could do, could cancel the smallest portion of their debt; they would, of necessity, be led to cry for mercy with the deepest contrition, and to acknowledge their need of that Savior whom they were instructed to expect.

***~~2. To show them the insufficiency of the legal sacrifices—~~***

Nothing could carry stronger conviction with it than this particular ordinance: for, if former sacrifices had prevailed, why would they be repeated? What occasion was there for the annual offerings, if the occasional ones had answered their full end? Or why would the same sins be atoned for in a future year, which have been expiated in the present year, if the present expiation has been satisfactory and complete?

Here, then, was the axe laid to the root of all self-righteous conceits. It was to no purpose that these ordinances were of Divine appointment; or that they were observed according to the strict letter of the law: they were never intended to serve as real expiations of sin; nor was the observance of them ever intended to form a justifying righteousness before God. They were intended only to shadow forth a Savior, to whom all must look, and through whom all must be justified. The very repetition of them was, in fact, not only a remembrance of the sins which rendered a Savior necessary; but a pledge, that such a Savior as they needed would in due time be sent to them.

***~~3. To direct their eyes to that Great Sacrifice who would in due time be offered—~~***

In every sacrifice which was offered, they saw the Lord Jesus Christ exhibited before them: and were reminded, that in due time he would "come to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself." They were informed that there was to arise from the loins of Abraham, "a Seed, in whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed." The Prophets Isaiah and Daniel had fully described the way in which the promised seed would effect the work assigned him: that he would "be cut off, but not for himself;" that he would be "wounded for our transgressions, and be bruised for our iniquities, [Isaiah 53:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.5-6); [Isaiah 53:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.11). [Daniel 9:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 9.24);" that he would "make his soul an offering for sin; and that in this way he would "finish transgression, and make an end of sin, and bring in an everlasting righteousness," by which all sinners who would believe in him, would be "justified."

Now, all this was set before them; and was seen by them, with more or less distinctness, according to the faith they had in exercise: and in every sacrifice which, from year to year, was offered, they saw a herald sent, and heard his proclamation, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world!"

That we may bring the matter more home to ourselves, let us consider,

***~~II. What good may be expected from stated remembrances of sins among us—~~***

It is granted, that nothing equivalent to the Mosaic ordinances is required of us. Yet, if we were to appoint stated seasons for ourselves—seasons for reviewing our past lives, and for special humiliation of our souls before God; I am persuaded we would find it highly conducive to our spiritual welfare. Such seasons would be useful,

***~~1. For the deepening of our repentance—~~***

We are apt to lose, very speedily, the convictions which sin has fastened upon our mind. At first, perhaps, they are pungent, and cause considerable anguish; but in a little time the impression wears away, and we almost forget that we have sinned at all. But if we had stated seasons for calling our ways to remembrance, our past convictions would be revived, and our humiliation before God be greatly promoted. The sins of early life being thus from time to time set before us, and those of daily incursion being added to them, we would have juster views of our extreme unworthiness. The whole life would then appear to be, what in reality it is—one continued scene of iniquity. For lack of such seasons of recollection, men view their sins as they do the heavens in a cloudy night, when they can see only here and there a star of greater magnitude, and at remote distances. Whereas, if our self-examinations were strict, and our retrospect frequent, our lives would appear rather like the heavens in the clearest night, full of stars of a greater or lesser order, and so connected as scarcely to leave an interval between them. With such views of ourselves, our repentance would not be slight, partial, transient—but deep, universal, permanent.

***~~2. For the endearing of the Savior to us—~~***

True is that saying, that "where much is forgiven, men will love much; and little, where little has been forgiven." Now, if we are in the habit of bringing before our eyes the sins of our whole life, and of viewing them, even as God does, in the aggregate, how shall we adore that mercy of God that has been extended to us, and that love of Christ which he has evinced in giving himself for us! Truly, it will appear almost incredible that even God himself would be capable of such condescension and grace.

This self-knowledge is at the root of the experience of the saints in Heaven. Behold them all prostrate before the throne, and casting down their crowns at the Savior's feet; while they sing, "To him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood!" This is the state of mind which self-knowledge has a tendency to generate: and if our seasons of humiliation were more deep and frequent, we would more resemble the glorified saints, both in the nature and in the expressions of our joy.

***~~3. For the augmenting of our vigilance against the recurrence of sin—~~***

It is a truth not generally considered, that *the sins which more easily beset us in early life, continue, more or less, our besetting sins to the end of our days*. Pride, envy, wrath, malice, lewdness, covetousness, rarely leave the soul of which they have once got an undisturbed possession. Now, if a person has been in the habit of self-examination from year to year, and of seeing by what temptations chiefly he has been overcome, he will know the better against what he needs more especially to watch: he will have seen, how, on many occasions, that which, if resisted in the first moment, might have been easily overcome—has, by being harbored in the mind, acquired an ascendancy over him, and defied his utmost efforts to subdue it.

He will have seen, especially, how he has been betrayed, by unwatchfulness, into sins to which he had no natural propensity; and that *there is not an evil in the human heart against which he has not reason to watch and pray*. In a word, he will feel the need of committing himself wholly to the guidance of his God, and of crying continually, "Hold me up, and I shall be safe!"

***~~From this subject, then, we may learn,~~***

***~~1. What use to make of the present season—~~***

There are seasons which seem to claim somewhat more than an ordinary regard. The commencement of a new year, or the return of our birthday, may well lead us to a review of the past year, and consequently of our whole lives: and, were it so improved, how far more profitable would we find the season, than if it were spent in carnal mirth!

I may add, too, how important is this suggestion in reference to eternity! Thousands go into the eternal world without having ever, in their whole lives, devoted one single day to the revision of their lives, and to humiliation for their sins. God forbid, my brethren, that you would be of that unhappy number! Let me recommend it to you all to begin, this day, to call your ways to remembrance; to enter minutely into the sins of your early youth, and of every succeeding year, even to the present hour.

Let me recommend you to mark, not merely the sins of greater enormity, but those which the world accounts as slight and trivial. Let me recommend to you to notice the sins of omission, as well as of commission; and the sins of defect, as well as those of utter neglect. Could you be prevailed upon to take such a retrospect, it could not fail of being attended with the best consequences to your spiritual edification in this life, and to your eternal welfare in the life to come.

***~~2. What especially to aim at, in all the exercises of your souls—~~***

There is a frame of mind peculiarly characteristic of the advanced Christian: and which, I conceive, is suggested by the considerations of my text. You have seen that the most pious of God's people, no less than others, were to observe a day in every year for the special purpose of remembering their past sins, and of afflicting their souls on account of them; while, at the same time, they were to renew their applications to God for mercy through the appointed sacrifices. A sense of sin was not to weaken their hope of God's mercy, on the one hand; nor was their confidence in God's mercy to weaken their sense of sin, on the other hand: both were to be retained in constant and united exercise; so that, while they "rejoiced with trembling," they might tremble with rejoicing.

Now, this is a state of mind by no means so common as might be wished. The generality of Christians, if they could feel towards God as a loving, obedient, and devoted spouse towards her husband, would conceive that they had attained the highest state of which they are capable. But, to make that image fully suited to our case, we must suppose the spouse to have been originally taken from the lowest and most degraded state by her husband; and, after her union with him, to have dishonored him, and debased herself, by the grossest enormities. We must further suppose her husband to have followed her with the most affectionate entreaties to return to him; to have assured her of his most entire forgiveness; and, having prevailed on her to return, to be exercising towards her all imaginable kindness, without ever once uttering a single word of upbraiding.

Now, suppose her to become faithful and obedient, and you will have a juster conception of the Christian's state. Though her husband has forgiven her—can you imagine that she has forgiven herself? On the contrary, does not every act of love on her husband's part fill her with deeper humility and self-abhorrence, for having ever acted so basely towards one of so exalted a character? Does not her whole fellowship with him, from day to day, augment her admiration of him, and her loathing of herself? Yes! Though forgiven, she never for a moment forgets what she is, or what she deserves: and her whole soul is prostrate before God and man, even in the midst of her fondest endearments or her sublimest joys.

Here is the Christian character: here is the character which I wish you all to attain. Do not mistake; you need not rush into gross sins in order to have a foundation for it: the spiritual adulteries of every one of you are manifest enough, without any fresh iniquities—you need only see how you have treated your divine Husband, and what base lusts you have harbored in your bosoms, from your youth up even until now, and you will see that you have need to "walk softly before God all your days," and to "loath yourselves before him in dust and ashes." This is "walking humbly with God." This will not abate either your confidence or your joy: but it will temper the one with fear, and the other with contrition!

***~~#2309~~***

***~~CHRIST SUPERSEDING THE LEGAL SACRIFICES~~***

***~~[Hebrews 10:5-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.5-10)~~***

"Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burned offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, 'Here I am--it is written about me in the scroll-- I have come to do your will, O God.'" First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burned offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" (although the law required them to be made). Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

THERE is not any important truth contained in the New Testament, which was not before revealed in the Old. But we have an advantage over the Jews, in that the obscurity which was cast over the language of prophecy, is removed by the interpretations of men divinely inspired to explain the sacred oracles. Hence we are enabled to see what the Jews could never comprehend, though plainly and repeatedly declared to them: God's determination to abrogate the Mosaic economy, in order to make way for the Christian dispensation. This was declared by David, while the law was yet in full force: and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews both quotes his words in proof of this point, and confirms them by additional declarations to the same effect.

We shall consider,

***~~I. The quotation as explained by the Apostle—~~***

In his comment on David's words, the Apostle throws great light upon:

***~~1. What is expressed in them—~~***

The Psalm beyond all doubt refers to Christ: for it was not possible that David would boast of his own obedience as superseding the law; since a compliance with the law constituted a very essential part of his duty. If it is thought that what is spoken in verse 12 is adverse to this construction, it must be remembered that the sins of the world were Christ's by imputation, [Isaiah 53:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.6); and therefore they might justly draw from him that complaint.

In the Psalm David speaks in the person of Christ, whom he represents as addressing the Father to this effect: 'You never designed the legal sacrifices to take away sin; that office you have assigned to me: and I have most willingly undertaken it, nor will I ever relinquish my services until I have completed all that I have undertaken.'

That the sacrifices were never ordained to take away sin is plain, from the contempt poured upon them by God himself in comparison with moral duties, 1 Samuel 15:22. [Hosea 6:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 6.6). Yes, and absolutely too, if unaccompanied with suitable dispositions in the offerers, [Isaiah 1:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.11-14); [Isaiah 66:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.3).

That Christ was sent into the world for that end appears also from the very first promise made to man, that "the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head, [Genesis 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.15)."

That he willingly undertook the office is declared by David much more strongly than in the passage as quoted by the Apostle. In the passage as quoted in my text, it is merely said, "I come to do your will, O God:" but in the Psalm it is written, "Lo, I come; I delight to do your will, O my God; yes your law is within my heart." All which additional expressions show the zeal with which Christ undertook our cause, and executed the arduous work that was assigned him.

That he would never relinquish it until it was accomplished was also strongly declared in those words, "My ears you have opened," which refer to the custom of boring the ear of a servant who refused to be liberated at the day of release, and engaged to abide for ever in his master's service, [Exodus 21:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 21.5-6).

The Apostle, in citing the passage, varies it in words, though he adheres to it in sense. He says, "A body have you prepared for me;" that is: It was necessary to the completion of my undertaking, that I would have somewhat to offer in sacrifice; and therefore you have prepared for me a body in the womb of a pure virgin, that being free from the taint and corruption transmitted to all the posterity of Adam, it might be fit to be offered in sacrifice for the sins of the world. The Apostle's meaning is precisely expressed in [Philippians 2:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.6-8).

But, to the inconceivable advantage of the Church, the Apostle brings forth from David's words,

***~~2. What is implied in them—~~***

Here we see the benefit of having *an inspired commentator on the Old Testament*. No Jew could have conceived all that was designed to be revealed in these words: but we are informed by God himself, that "when it was said, Lo, I come to do your will, O God," it was designed to intimate that all the legal sacrifices would be swept away, and the whole Jewish economy be superseded by the Christian dispensation, "He takes away the first, that he may establish the second." This was an explanation of God's hidden purpose, an explanation, which no uninspired man could have dared to offer. But in several other parts of this epistle are similar explanations given, and not in a way of conjecture, but of authoritative declaration.

Thus, from the mention of a New Covenant which God would make with his people, the Apostle infers, "In that he says: A New Covenant, he has made the first old. Now that which decays and waxes old is ready to vanish away, [Hebrews 8:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.8); [Hebrews 8:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.13)."

In another place, having cited God's declaration that, to those who laid hold on that covenant, their sins and iniquities he would remember no more, he draws this inference, "Now where remission of sins is, there is no more offering for sin; and consequently all the Jewish sacrifices are swept away! [Hebrews 10:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.17-18).

Again, in another place having cited the words of the Prophet Haggai, "Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also Heaven," he says, "This word—yet once more, signifies the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things which are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain, [Hebrews 12:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.26-27)."

Thus we have obtained a deep insight into the meaning of our text, and may with confidence proceed to consider:

***~~II. His declaration founded upon it—~~***

There are two important points which the Apostle deduces from these words of David, namely:

***~~1. That salvation flows from God's will as the source—~~***

Sanctification imports a setting apart of anything for God. Hence the tabernacle with all its vessels are said to have been sanctified, [Exodus 40:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 40.10-12); and Christ himself says, "For their sakes I sanctify myself, [John 17:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.19);" and it is in this sense that the term "sanctified" is used in the text, verse 14; it means a separation for God, in order to eternal salvation.

Now it is solely from the "will of God" thus made known to his Son, and thus fulfilled by him, that any are made partakers of salvation. It was not possible for any such plan to have originated with any other than God himself. When God's dealings with the fallen angels were considered, who would have imagined that man, partaking of their iniquity, would yet be rescued from their doom?

Supposing that such a thought could have entered into the mind of man, who could have contrived such a way of maintaining the honor of the Divine government, and of making the discordant attributes of justice and mercy to harmonize in the salvation of man? *If such an expedient as the substitution of God's own Son in the place of sinners could have been devised, who could have dared to propose it to the Deity!*Who could have prevailed upon him to acquiesce in it? The more this is considered, the more will the salvation of man appear to be totally independent of man himself (as far as respects the contriving or the meriting of it), and to be the fruit of infinite wisdom, sovereign grace, and unbounded love! [2 Timothy 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.9). From the first laying of the foundation, to the bringing forth of the top-stone, we must cry, Grace, grace unto it! [Zechariah 4:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.6-7).

***~~2. That salvation flows from Christ's sacrifice as the means—~~***

It might *seem*that men, under the law, were accepted on account of the sacrifices, which were offered according to the Mosaic ritual. But, not to mention the impossibility that the blood of bulls and of goats would take away sin, verse 4, the very repetition of those sacrifices showed their insufficiency for the removal of guilt, or for the satisfying of men's consciences, verse 1:3. [Hebrews 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.9). They had no effect but as they led the offerers to the Lord Jesus Christ, or expressed their faith in his sin-atoning sacrifice.

All who have ever found acceptance with God, whether before the law, or under it, or since its abolition, have been admitted to mercy purely "through the one offering of Jesus Christ." Nothing but that could ever satisfy Divine justice; nothing but that could ever atone for one single sin. Nor can any creature, to the end of the world, ever obtain favor with God, but in consideration of that sacrifice presented to God for us, and pleaded by us as the one ground of our hope! [Acts 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.12). [1 Corinthians 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.11).

Here I cannot but call your attention to the minuteness and force of David's statement, and to the redoubled force and energy expressed in the Apostle's citation of it. David enumerates the different kinds of sacrifices, in order to show that none (whether those burned outside the camp, [Leviticus 16:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 16.27), or those consumed on the altar, [Exodus 29:38-42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 29.38-42), or those of which but a small part was burned, and the rest was divided between the priest and the offerer, [Leviticus 7:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 7.1-6); [Leviticus 7:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 7.19), were of any avail to take away sin.

Twice does the Apostle repeat this enumeration of them, in order the more abundantly to manifest the eternal purpose of God to liberate us from the Jewish yoke, and to establish throughout the world the purer dispensation of the Gospel; so that all, whether Jews or Gentiles, would henceforth "know nothing as a ground of hope, but Jesus Christ and him crucified!"

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How vain is men's confidence in any services of their own!~~***

To have been baptized in our infancy, to have attended punctually the outward duties of the Sabbath, and to have waited occasionally upon the Lord at his table—are deemed in general satisfactory evidences of our conversion to God, and sufficient grounds for our hope towards him. But, if the whole multitude of legal institutions, framed by God's own order, and according to a model shown to Moses in the mount, were of no value as recommending men to God—then how much less can the few services which we perform be sufficient to procure us acceptance with him?

But it may be said, that moral services are more pleasing to God than ceremonial: true; but we are not told that God willed them, any more than the others, as means of effecting our reconciliation with him. It was the incarnation and death of Christ that God "willed;" and, in a remarkable correspondence with the text, he thrice, by an audible voice from Heaven, said: This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, verse 8 with [Matthew 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 3.17). Let every self-righteous hope then be banished; and let us learn to glory in Christ alone! [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.14).

***~~2. What encouragement have all to devote themselves to God through Christ!~~***

We have the united testimony of Prophets and Apostles that God wills the salvation of men through the sacrifice of his own Son, and that Christ as willingly offered himself a sacrifice in order to effect their salvation. What more can be needed but that we go to God in that new and living way, which is so clearly pointed out to us? We can have no doubt of God's willingness to save, or of the sufficiency of that salvation which he has provided for us.

Let nothing then keep us back from God: but let us look to Christ as the atoning sacrifice for our sins, [1 John 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.2), and plead the merit of his all-atoning blood. Thus, sanctifying ourselves in his name, we shall be perfected before God, verse 14 with [Hebrews 9:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.12); being sanctified also by the Holy Spirit, we shall be acceptable in the sight of God and our Father for ever and ever! [Romans 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 15.16).

***~~#2310~~***

***~~THE PERFECTION OF CHRIST'S SACRIFICE~~***

***~~[Hebrews 10:14-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.14-17)~~***

"By one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says: "This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds." Then he adds: "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more."

IT is a favorite sentiment with some, that we need not study anything but the four Gospels in order to attain a complete view of our holy religion. But while I acknowledge that a person who studies the four Gospels may certainly learn the way of salvation from them, I must add that his views of Christianity will of necessity be very imperfect, if he does not avail himself of the further light which is afforded to him in the epistles.

To what purpose has the Apostle Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, written so argumentatively on the subject of justification by faith alone, if we do not derive from his statement a fuller knowledge of that fundamental doctrine, than we could have acquired without it?

And who will say that he could have attained from the Gospels, or even from the Mosaic law itself, such clear views of the priestly office of Christ as are set before us in the Epistle to the Hebrews? There the parallel between his and the Aaronic priesthood is recorded, and the superiority of his priesthood is pointed out with a fullness and precision which no uninspired man could ever have attained.

The tabernacle in which the Levitical priests ministered was glorious; but Christ's was more glorious, being not made with hands, even his own sacred body.

They were appointed to their office by a command; he, with an oath.

They entered into a holy place on earth; he, into Heaven itself.

They entered with the blood of beasts; he, with his own blood.

Their sacrifices purified the patterns of heavenly things; his, the heavenly things themselves.

Their sacrifices purified legally, the flesh; his sacrifice purified, really, the conscience.

Their priests were only priests; he, a Priest to God, and a Testator to us.

They offered their sacrifices often; he, only once.

They offered for themselves first; he, for us only.

They entered the veil to come forth again; he, never to come forth until he shall come to judge the world.

They obtained a temporary remission of some sins; he obtained an everlasting remission of all sin!

It is in this last view that his office is spoken of in the passage before us. The Aaronic priests offered often, because their offerings could never take away sin. But he, "by his one offering, has perfected for ever them that are sanctified: whereof the Holy Spirit also is a witness to us."

The peculiar solemnity with which his asseveration is here confirmed, even by an appeal to God himself, will lead me to consider,

***~~I. The truth attested—~~***

A more important truth than this can scarcely be conceived: that Christ's one offering has done that which all the Levitical sacrifices never could have done! It has procured for all who trust in it, a full and perfect and everlasting remission of all their sins.

***~~Let us notice this truth as contrasted with the ordinances of the Mosaic law—~~***

The Levitical sacrifices were renewed from year to year, because of their inefficiency: but Christ's sacrifice was offered only once, because it completely answered every end for which it was designed.

The Levitical sacrifices perfected no man, either as to his acceptance before God, or as to the peace of his own soul: as far as they had any efficacy, they prevailed only for a year; and then must be repeated, in order to obtain a further remission. But Christ's sacrifice rendered men perfect, both before God and in their own consciences. God was so satisfied with it, that he has nothing more to demand at the hands of those who trust in it. He considers it as a full discharge of all that the law requires of us, and a full price for all that our souls can need either in time or eternity. The sinner who looks to it may well be satisfied, since God himself is satisfied, and all the demands of law and justice are satisfied.

Thus, all who are "sanctified" to the service of their God, whatever their past sins may have been—are perfected, and that for ever! Sins of the deepest die are purged by this sacrifice; and "all who believe in it, are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses."

***~~In this view, what a glorious truth it is!~~***

How honorable to Christ! how consoling to us! As it respects the Lord Jesus Christ, it shows how completely he has effected all which he came into the world to do. "He has made an end of sin, and made reconciliation for iniquity;" and "obtained eternal redemption for us." Nothing is lacking to complete his work: his one offering has effected all.

As it respects us, we have in Christ's sacrifice all that we can desire:  
when once we recollect who he is, not man only, but God manifest in the flesh;  
when we recollect the covenant-engagements entered into between his Father and him; he on his part undertaking to make atonement for sin; and the Father undertaking to accept it in our behalf;  
when we recollect that he has been raised from the dead in proof of his having fulfilled all his engagements; and that he is now invested with all power in Heaven and in earth to impart to sinners the blessings he has purchased for them—then what more can we want? The soul acquiesces in this mysterious appointment, and confidently relies upon it, assured, that, if salvation is not to be found in him, it is not to be found at all.

This truth being attested by the Holy Spirit, let us consider,

***~~II. The testimony adduced—~~***

***~~The witness to this truth is no other than "the Holy Spirit"—~~***

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God:" and whether the writers of it were Prophets or Apostles, "they all spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." Throughout the whole Scripture, too, that Divine Spirit has one great object, which is to testify of Christ. By the prophets he testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ, and of the glory that would follow. Indeed, "the testimony of Jesus was the spirit of prophecy" throughout, [Revelation 19:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 19.10), and in this light we should regard all that the prophets have written. We should consider their words, not merely as the words of the Holy Spirit, but as a testimony given by the Holy Spirit, in order to show us what we should believe respecting the Lord Jesus, and to increase our faith in him. And, whatever his testimony is, we should give the most implicit credit to it, adoring him for his wonderful goodness in thus condescending to teach the inquiring, and to confirm the doubting, soul. On this occasion,

***~~His testimony is most convincing—~~***

The passage cited by the Apostle, is taken from the prophecies of Jeremiah, [Jeremiah 31:31-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.31-34). He has before cited it in a preceding chapter, [Hebrews 8:8-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.8-12). There it is adduced more at length, in order to show that the Jews under the Mosaic dispensation were taught to look forward to a New Covenant, and to regard their own as waxing old.

In the passage before us, a smaller portion of it only is adduced, in order to mark in a peculiar manner the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice for the sins of the world. Its force will be best seen by contrasting it with the provisions made for the forgiveness of sin under the Mosaic dispensation. There was no actual forgiveness of sins obtained by the sacrifices which the law prescribed: they were pardoned, so to speak, for a year only; at the expiration of which time, the same sacrifices were to be again offered, in order to the obtaining of a protracted pardon. Thus the very sacrifices which were offered for sin, were rather a remembrance of sins than a real expiation of them; so that the conscience of the sinner was never relieved from a sense of guilt, and never brought to the enjoyment of solid peace.

But, under that very dispensation, the Holy Spirit testified that provision was made by the New Covenant, for the full and everlasting remission of all sin, since God expressly engaged, "Their sins and iniquities I will remember no more:" and consequently no further sacrifice was needed to be offered for them. This testimony comes exactly to the point. The Aaronic priests repeated annually the same sacrifices; because the sins for which they were offered, were still kept in remembrance by God: but, in consequence of the offering which Christ has made, the sins of those who believe in him shall "never be remembered:" and consequently, without any repetition of his sacrifice, his people are "perfected forever," being brought into perfect peace with God, and perfect peace in their own consciences.

***~~Hence we see,~~***

***~~1. How amply the Scripture testifies of Christ!~~***

It is not merely of his Messiahship that the prophets speak: they enter fully into every part of his character, and work, and offices. There is not anything which we are concerned to know respecting him, which is not revealed in the Old Testament. The revelation of him is indeed less clear than in the New Testament, but not a whit less glorious. When the true sense of the different passages is ascertained, there will be found truths of which the superficial reader has no conception.

Our blessed Lord says, "*Search the Scriptures*; for they are they that testify of me." And if we would fulfill that duty with care and diligence, and with earnest prayer to God for the teachings of his Spirit, we would find in the Scriptures an inexhaustible mine of wealth, and be enriched by them with all "the unsearchable riches of Christ! [Proverbs 2:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 2.1-6)."

***~~2. What loss they sustain, who receive not its testimony!~~***

It is a lamentable fact, that the generality of professing Christians are looking out for some other offering to present to God, in order to effect their reconciliation with him. Every considerate person will sometimes put this question to himself, "With what shall I come before the Lord?" And the ignorant conceit of Balak is that which then presents itself to his mind, "Shall I come before him with burned-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"

But if men read even the Jewish Scriptures with attention, they might see how erroneous such views were, and how vain such hopes are. They would see that the New Covenant, which has been ratified by the blood of Christ, prescribes a very different method of acceptance with God: they would see that the one offering of Christ is a sufficient atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world, and that all attempts to add to it are vain.

Dear brethren, believe, I beg you, the witness of the Holy Spirit on this all-important subject. "Make not God himself a liar," as John expresses it, by denying or doubting this record. Be assured that he will not deceive you. If this were the testimony of a fallible man, you might well question it: but when Prophets and Apostles, all inspired by the Holy Spirit, concur in it, you should embrace it with your whole hearts, and rely upon it with your whole souls.

***~~3. How exalted are the privileges of every true believer!~~***

All who are savingly interested in the one offering of Christ upon the cross, are "perfected forever." God has cast all their sins behind his back, and into the very depths of the sea. He has not only forgiven, but, if I may so speak, has forgotten, all their sins. They are blotted out as a morning cloud. True it is, that they still need the application of the same blood to their consciences, because they are yet compassed with infirmities, so that even their holy things need to be cleansed from the iniquity that cleaves to them. They are like persons who have been washed in a bath; they are clean every whit; yet need they to wash their feet, because they contract defilement in walking even from the bath, [John 13:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.8-10).

But as to all their former sins, they are altogether blotted out of the book of God's remembrance. Yet let it not therefore be supposed that they should be forgotten by us. No! they should be ever before us as a ground of humiliation, though not as a ground of fear: and the more assured we are that God is pacified towards us, the more should we loath ourselves; and pant the more to "be sanctified wholly, in body, soul, and spirit."

***~~#2311~~***

***~~THE WAY OF ACCESS TO GOD THROUGH THE VEIL~~***

**[Hebrews 10:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.19-22)**

"Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water."

MAN, by the fall, lost that fellowship with God which he had maintained in his state of innocence. The intent of Christianity is to restore him to the enjoyment of his privilege. Hence *the inspired writers urge the great doctrines of the Gospel, not merely as truths which are to be believed, but as motives which are to animate and direct our conduct.*The author of this epistle has set forth at large the correspondence between our blessed Lord, and the typical representations which were given of him under the Mosaic law. He now proceeds to the practical improvement of his subject. In the words before us he opens,

***~~I. The grounds of our access to God—~~***

They who are ignorant of their own extreme guilt and helplessness, imagine, that they can come to God without any mediator. But the Scriptures uniformly declare that the way of access to him is,

***~~1. Through the atonement—~~***

The original way of access to God by the *covenant of works*was shut up for ever upon the first transgression. Nor does that *typical*way which was appointed under the law continue any longer. There is "a new way" now opened to us through the veil. The human nature of Christ was represented by the veil of the temple. At the very instant that his body expired upon the cross, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom [Matthew 27:51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.51). That being the precise time of the evening sacrifice, all the worshipers in the temple had a perfect view of the holy of holies. Thus an intimation was given to them, that, *by the rending of Christ's body, the way into the most holy place was opened indiscriminately to all.*As the high-priest went into the typical sanctuary with the blood of the sacrifice, so might all from henceforth go into the very Heaven of heavens, as it were, with the blood of Jesus.

This way was now "consecrated for them" by Jesus himself. It was a new way, not only because it was different from that which had existed before, but because it would never wax old or vanish as the other had done, [Hebrews 8:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.13). And it was a livingway, because, while the former way prohibited access to all, except the high-priest, under the penalty of death, this new and living way infallibly imparts life to all who come to God in it.

***~~2. Through the intercession of Christ—~~***

The Church of God is that "house" which the temple of Solomon prefigured. In it God dwells in a more immediate manner than he ever did by the Shechinah upon the mercy-seat, [2 Corinthians 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.16). Christ, as the great High-priest, presides over this house. He is gone with his own blood into the holy of holies, [Hebrews 9:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.12). He is there sprinkling it on our behalf in the presence of his heavenly Father. There also is He offering the incense of his continual intercession.

Under the law, the hopes of the Israelites were founded on the intercession of their high-priest. In vain was the sacrifice killed, if its blood was not carried within the veil: and in vain would it be carried thither, if it were not sprinkled before the mercy-seat, and accompanied with the clouds of incense.

Thus not even the *death*of Christ is, of itself, a sufficient warrant for us to draw near to God. But his *intercession*added to it gives us boldness, and access with confidence, [Hebrews 7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.25). We may go to God upon this ground as to a reconciled father. Nor need any sinner whatever deem himself too unworthy to approach his throne. All are now constituted priests unto God, 1 Peter 2:9. [Revelation 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.6). And all who bring the blood of Christ with them, and rely on his prevailing intercession, shall surely find acceptance with him.

There is however something further which the worshipers of God must attend to, namely,

***~~II. The manner in which we would approach him—~~***

Christians are not to go to God with a crude and inconsiderate familiarity. They would consider the majesty of Him before whom they come; and would draw near to him with,

***~~1. A sincere heart—~~***

To go before God and declare things which we neither feel nor believe, is to mock and insult him. If our *confessions*are without humility, our *petitions*without fervor, and our *thanksgivings*without gratitude—then how is it possible that God would hear us? If we draw near to him with our lips while our hearts are far from him, we worship him in vain, [Matthew 15:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 15.8-9). To have imbibed true notions, is not sufficient. God requires truth in our inward parts, [Psalm 51:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.6). And those alone can worship him acceptably, who worship him in spirit and in truth, [John 4:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.24).

***~~2. An assured faith—~~***

When we go to God in prayer, we should not doubt whether He is willing to accept us. We should be thoroughly persuaded that "Christ is the way, the truth, and the life, [John 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.6);" and that he will save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him. To be assured of our own personal interest in him is not necessary. But we should have the most assured belief of the sufficiency of his atonement and intercession.

*Nor should we limit his power and grace under an idea of our own unworthiness.*To ask with a doubtful mind, is to cast a reflection upon him at the very time that we are imploring his favor. And we are warned by God himself that such wavering petitions never shall prevail, [James 1:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.6-7).

***~~3. A good conscience—~~***

The conscience of every man has been more or less defiled. Nor could the offerings under the law perfect a man with respect to it, [Hebrews 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.9). But the blood of Jesus will cleanse it from its defilement, [Hebrews 9:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.14). And, if we heartily endeavor to keep it void of offense in the future, we shall enjoy the testimony of a good conscience, [2 Corinthians 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.12). But if we live in the habitual neglect of any duty, or the allowed commission of any sin, we shall have an evil and accusing conscience.

It is necessary therefore that our hearts be purged from the *guilt*of sin by the sprinkling of Christ's blood, and from the *love*and *practice*of sin by his Spirit. Without this we can never approach God with comfort or acceptance. We shall stand self-condemned as hypocrites, and every petition we offer will appear a solemn mockery of God. We must therefore have our hearts purified from all *habitual*and *allowed*sin. Nor unless we have, can we hope for any answer of peace unto our souls, [Proverbs 28:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.9). [Psalm 66:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 66.18).

***~~4. A holy conduct—~~***

As our *inward principle*must be pure, so must also our *outward practice*be. The priests washed their bodies before they went within the veil, to denote the purity which was required of them by God, [Leviticus 16:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 16.4). Thus must we also be careful to possess that purity, if we would approach him with acceptance. Not that our sanctity of heart and life will procure us favor in his sight. The only grounds of our acceptance have been before stated. But there is a fitness for the enjoying of his benefits. And if we possess not that fitness, in vain shall we expect the benefits themselves.

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

Some may ask, What shall I do, seeing I do not possess these requisites? Shall I stay away from the throne of grace entirely? We answer, No; if we cannot ask as we *ought*, we would ask as we *can*. God will assist us if we endeavor to serve him aright; and will impart to us those holy dispositions, that shall qualify us for the reception of his richest blessings. Let us then thankfully improve the liberty he has afforded us. Let us see the veil now rent asunder, and behold our God upon his mercy-seat. Behold, his address to every one of us is: Draw near to me, and I will draw near to you; cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded, [James 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.8). In obedience to his command, let us surround his throne with fervent importunity. Let us ask for mercy and grace to help us in every time of need, [Hebrews 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.16); and so open our mouths wide before him that He may fill and satisfy us with good things, [Psalm 81:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.10). Thus shall we enjoy the sweetest fellowship with him in this world; and shortly be admitted to his more immediate presence in the world to come!

***~~#2312~~***

***~~STEADFASTNESS AND ACTIVITY IN GOD'S SERVICE INCULCATED~~***

***~~[Hebrews 10:23-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.23-25)~~***

"Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

Mere professing Christians in general do not sufficiently advert to Christian principles as a ground of action. While they acknowledge their obligation to serve God, they lose sight of those considerations which alone can render his yoke easy, and his burden light. They bear in mind that Christ offered himself a sacrifice for sin; but they forget that his priestly office, which was but in part executed on earth, is still carrying on in Heaven. Were this duly contemplated, it would afford a stimulus to exertion which nothing else can give.

In the fourth chapter of this epistle, the Apostle urges Jesus' priestly intercession in Heaven as a motive to steadfastness in our most holy profession: "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess, [Hebrews 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.14)." In the passage before us he repeats the same glorious truth, and grounds upon it, not only the same exhortation, but an exhortation to various other duties connected with it. What these duties are, it is my intention at this time to point out.

Consider then,

***~~I. Our duty as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ is hope, hope being the offspring of faith—~~***

***~~It is our duty to profess openly our faith and hope in the Lord Jesus Christ—~~***

We are not to be contented with exercising faith in him as our Savior: we must confess him also before men: for, if "with the heart we believe unto righteousness, it is with the mouth that confession must be made unto salvation, [Romans 10:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.10)." But,

***~~This profession we must "hold fast without wavering"—~~***

The more we make our light to shine before men, the more will those who "love darkness, rather than light" oppose us. Nothing will be left untried to divert us from our purpose. Persuasion, derision, menaces, will all be used in their turn: and all manner of influence will be brought to bear upon us, if by any means we may be prevailed upon to renounce what the world calls our wild enthusiasm and folly. But we must "hold fast our profession," whatever efforts be made to wrest it from us: we must hold it fast "without wavering." There must be no inclination of the mind towards the ways we have forsaken, or the society we have left: "We must forget our own people and our father's house, if we would that our heavenly Bridegroom would have pleasure in our beauty, [Psalm 45:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 45.10-11)." We must "hate father and mother, and even our own lives," in comparison with Christ, [Luke 14:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.26-27). There must be in us a determination of heart to "follow the Lord fully," and at all events; even though we are threatened with scourging and imprisonment, as the Apostles were, [Acts 4:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.19-20); or with a cruel death, as were Daniel and the three Hebrew youths, [Daniel 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 4.18); [Daniel 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 6.10).

As for those vain reasonings by which men endeavor to justify their departure from God, they must not be entertained for one moment: Our whole life and conduct should proclaim "whose we are, or whom we serve." We should be "shining as lights in the world;" and be as "epistles of Christ, known and read by all men."

Connected with our duty to Christ as his followers, is,

***~~II. Our duty as members of his mystical body—~~***

We are "not to put our light under a bushel or a bed." When once we become united to Christ by faith, we become members of the body, of which he is the Head. To that body we from henceforth have duties, even as the members of our corporeal frame have to the body of which they constitute a part. With that body we are to unite, both in its public and social meetings, and not by withdrawing ourselves from it, to show an indifference to its welfare.

Some there were, even in the Apostle's days, who, through cowardice or worldly-mindedness, forsook the assemblies of the Church: and some there are who do so at the present day. But whatever vain excuses they may offer for their conduct, they grossly neglect their duty, which is, to edify, as far as they are able, every member of Christ's mystical body. This all are bound to do,

***~~1. In a way of mutual inspection—~~***

We should "consider one another;" we should notice each other's wants and weaknesses, defects and failings, in order to guard each other against the very beginnings of declension in the divine life, and to stimulate one another to exertion in the cause of truth and love. We should mark also one another's abilities and opportunities for serving God, in order that the energies of all may be employed to the best effect.

The members of our natural body, if attempting to execute offices for which they are not fitted, can effect little; but, when exerting themselves in their appropriate sphere, they all contribute to the general good. Thus should all the members of the Church seek out for themselves, and assign to each other, such offices as they are best qualified to perform; that, each laboring in his proper vocation, ("he who ministers, for instance, or teaches, or exhorts, or gives, or rules," in the due discharge of their respective duties, [Romans 12:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.7-8),) the whole body may be edified, and God's name be glorified.

***~~2. In a way of mutual edification—~~***

Love, both in its feelings and actings, is apt to languish, if it is not watched, and nourished, and quickened to activity, from time to time. "This gift of God that is in us, needs to be stirred up," and fanned to a flame, by mutual exhortations. Hence we are told to "provoke one another unto love and to good works." No member of the body should be idle: there are some good works which all may perform: and all should be penetrated with a desire to do what they can. It is by the unwearied exertion of all their powers that the designs of God are to be accomplished, both in the Church and in the world. But, as all are apt to be remiss, all should exhort and animate one another, and, "so much the more as we see the day approaching."

The final destruction of Jerusalem was very near at hand when this epistle was written: and that period would be most afflictive to the Church who fled to the mountains, as well as to those who abode in the city: and therefore they all needed to prepare for that trial, and to labor with redoubled zeal for the Lord, while an opportunity of serving him was afforded to them.

And to us also, there is a day of trial near at hand, even the day of death, and of our appearing before God in judgment. Then all our opportunities of serving and honoring God will be terminated forever. O how diligent then should we be in redeeming the present time, and in laboring while it is day; seeing that the night, when no man can work, is so near at hand! To impress these thoughts on each other's minds, and to stimulate one another to activity in the consideration of them, is our bounden duty: and whatever we may imagine about serving God acceptably in secret, while we neglect these public and social duties, we shall find ourselves awfully mistaken, when God shall call us to account for "hiding our talent in a napkin."

Such being our duties to Christ and his Church, let us notice,

***~~III. Our encouragement to perform both the one and the other—~~***

***~~God is faithful to his promises—~~***

Great, "exceeding great and precious are the promises" which he has given us in his word; promises suited to every state in which every member can be placed. In the covenant of grace they are all contained, even in that covenant of which Christ is the Mediator and Surety: and "in Christ they are all yes and amen, to the glory of our covenant-God and Father, [1 Corinthians 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.20)." Not one of them shall ever fail of accomplishment: for "God is not a man, that he would lie, or the son of man, that he would repent." Indeed "he has confirmed his promises with an oath, that, by two immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong consolation."

The experience of all ages attests this blessed truth, that God is faithful to his promises. Joshua's appeal to all Israel, at the close of his long-protracted life and warfare, may be made also to every child of Abraham, "Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the LORD your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed! [Joshua 23:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 23.14)."

***~~This consideration may well animate us to the performance of all our duties—~~***

If no promises had been given us, we might well have been discouraged: for who could "engage in such an unequal warfare at his own charges?"

In like manner, if the promises had been less extensive, or less free—then we might well despond; because we could have never merited the performance of them, nor ever have supplied what might be lacking in them.

Moreover, if there had been any room to question God's fidelity, we would still have been equally far from any solid comfort.

But when we find the promises so perfectly free, that all are at liberty to lay hold upon them; and so full, that they extend to every possible need; and so sure, that sooner shall Heaven and earth pass away, than one jot or tittle of them shall fail; do we not feel encouraged to embrace them, and to rely upon them, and to plead them, and to go forth in the strength of them to serve our God? Is not this one word, "My grace is sufficient for you!" a full warrant for undertaking any service, or for meeting any trial, to which God may call us? May we not boldly say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!"

Here then is our encouragement to perform our duties to Christ and his Church. Whatever we may have to encounter for Christ's sake, we may, in reliance upon his word, "hold fast our profession;" and whatever exertion may be necessary for filling up our respective offices as members of his body, we may labor and not faint; assured that, if we are "steadfast, and immoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord, our labor shall not be in vain in the Lord! [1 Corinthians 15:58](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.58)."

What then shall I say more?

***~~Is God faithful to his engagements? Then,~~***

***~~1. Be faithful to your commitment to God—~~***

If you have given up yourselves to him as his purchased possession, then have you bound yourselves to "glorify him with your bodies and your spirits which are his."

Address yourselves then to the work of the Lord; and "whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might." If you meet with difficulties and trials, be not discouraged, but go on boldly in the name and strength of the Lord. Draw not back on any account: for, "if any man draws back, God will have no pleasure in him." "He only who endures to the end, shall be saved." "Look to yourselves then, that you lose not the things which you have wrought, but that you receive a full reward, 2 John verse 8." "Be faithful unto death; and God will give you a crown of life!"

***~~2. Live by faith upon the promises—~~***

It is "by the promises that you have already been made partakers of a divine nature, [2 Peter 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.4);" and "by them must you cleanse yourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God, 2 Corinthians 7:1." Lay hold then on the promises: search them out with care: plead them before God with earnestness: and expect the accomplishment of them with confident assurance. This is the great secret of living unto God. This will keep up a continual fellowship between God and the soul. This will bring down Omnipotence to your aid. This will make every trial light, and every duty easy. This will enable you to defy all your enemies, and to challenge them all, whether individually or collectively, "Who shall separate me from the love of Christ! [Romans 8:35-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.35-39)." This will render you blessings to others, as well as blessed in your own souls: for those who behold your light, will "thank God, and take courage," and be emboldened to serve God with increased alacrity themselves. Thus too you will be prepared for "the day that is approaching:" for while the idle and unprofitable servant will be "cast into outer darkness, where is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth," the active and faithful servant will receive the plaudits of his Divine Master, and will "enter into the joy of his Lord!"

***~~#2313~~***

***~~THE EVIL AND DANGER OF APOSTASY~~***

***~~[Hebrews 10:26-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.26-31)~~***

"If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people." It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!"

*WE cannot be too strongly on our guard against attaching ourselves to human systems in religion.* The partisans of human systems take a partial view of the Scriptures, leaning invariably to those passages which appear to sanction their favorite dogmas, and excluding all mention of those which have a contrary aspect. They all take it for granted, that the things which they know not how to reconcile, are contrary to, and inconsistent with, each other. But as in a machine wheels may move in opposite directions, and yet so harmonize as to subserve one common end—so, in the Word of God, truths which have an opposite aspect, may be perfectly reconcilable to each other, and equally conducive to the accomplishment of the Divine purposes.

The Apostle Paul insisted, as strongly as anyone could do, on the doctrines of grace, showing that all was ordered by God according to the counsel of his own will: yet no Apostle spoke more strongly than he on the danger of apostasy; or taught more forcibly the necessity of continual watchfulness on our part in order to the attainment of those blessings which God had from all eternity prepared for us. It is on this subject that he is speaking in the passage before us; wherein he cautions the Hebrew converts against apostasy, bidding them to hold fast the profession of their faith without wavering; and warning them, that, if they turned back from God, it would be to their everlasting perdition.

In the words which I have just read, he sets forth,

***~~I. The evil of apostasy—~~***

It is not of *all*sin, or even of all *willful*sin, that he speaks: for, if there were no pardon for willful sin after baptism, or after we have embraced the Gospel, who could hope ever to attain salvation, since there is not a man in the universe who has not, on someone occasion at least, knowingly and willfully done what he ought not, or left undone what he ought to have done.

The sin spoken of in the text, is, a total and willful apostasy from the Gospel of Christ. This appears from the whole context, both from that which precedes, and that which follows.

In the *preceding*context he bids them to "hold fast the profession of their faith without wavering;" and then he adds, "for, if we sin willfully;" that is, by renouncing our holy profession, we reduce ourselves to the most awful condition that can be imagined; seeing that, having put away all affiance in the sacrifice of Christ, there remains no other sacrifice for our sins.

In the following context the sin is opened at large under three separate heads, which, while they mark distinctly the nature of the sin which is intended, display the evil of it in most tremendous colors.

***~~Let us consider each of them in its order—~~***

1. Apostasy, he tells us, is a "trampling the Son of God under foot." The Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, came down from Heaven to seek and to save those who were lost. We, when we are baptized in his name, or make a profession of faith in him, acknowledge him before all to be the Savior of the world. All other lords we then renounce; and all other grounds of hope before God; and in effect we say with Peter, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life: and we believe and are sure that you are that Christ, the Son of the living God! [John 6:68-69](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.68-69)." But when we renounce our faith in him, we, as far as in us lies, cast him down from his throne, and trample him under our feet; declaring that he is unworthy of the honor which we had erroneously put upon him, and that we will "no longer have him to reign over us:" yes, we even "crucify him afresh, and put him to an open shame! [Hebrews 6:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.6)."

2. Next, it is a "counting of the blood of the covenant an unholy thing." The Mosaic covenant was ratified with blood; and with that blood both the tabernacle with all its vessels, and the people who worshiped before it, were sanctified, and set apart as holy to the Lord, [Hebrews 9:18-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.18-21).

The covenant of *grace*is ratified with the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ; and, when we "come to the knowledge of the truth," we also are sanctified with it, and set apart to the service of our God. We profess to consider that blood as the one procuring cause of all that we either have or hope for: and we look for all the blessings of the covenant solely through the merit of his blood as shed for us, and as sprinkled on us. But, when we cast off our profession, we declare before all, that we consider the blood of Christ as having no virtue at all as an atonement for sin, and as being, in fact, of no more efficacy than the blood of bulls and goats, or even of a malefactor, justly put to death.

3. Further, it is an "insulting of the Spirit of grace." The Holy Spirit, both before and after the death of Jesus, bore witness to him by innumerable signs and wonders: and, when we are brought to the knowledge of the truth, it is by that same blessed Spirit illuminating our minds, and sealing the truth with power upon our souls. But, when we renounce the truth we have received, we insult that Divine Agent, as having borne witness to a falsehood: and we ascribe all his miracles either to Satanic agency, or to some mysterious imposture. We even laugh also at the impressions which he has made upon our minds, and deride all his merciful suggestions as fanaticism and delusion.

In this view of the above, apostasy is a most tremendous evil!

Those who are guilty of it, speak of it only as a change of sentiment resulting from conviction; and thus they take credit to themselves as having grown in wisdom, and been faithful to their convictions.

But God sees not as man sees. God beholds all the evils of the heart which have been accessary to this change; and all the injury that results from it, both to his honor, and to the world at large. He sees the *pride of heart*which will not receive the truth upon his testimony. He sees the *love of the world*which operates to draw the heart from him; yes, and the enmity of the heart against him, which will not submit, either to be saved or governed in so mysterious a way. In other sins he beholds only a resistance to his authority; but in this sin he beholds a contempt of all the wonders of his wisdom and love.

A person who has never received the knowledge of the truth, cannot commit this sin, or any sin of equal malignity. It is the resisting of light that has been imparted, and the acting contrary to it to such an extent as to call it darkness; this it is which makes the guilt so great, that, humanly speaking, it can never be forgiven. Were it indeed repented of, and were mercy sought through the blood of Jesus, even this sin, great as it is, might be forgiven: but *the commission of it implies such desperate wickedness and obduracy, that it never can, without a miracle of mercy, be repented of*, [Hebrews 6:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.4-6).

Hence then may be seen,

**II. The danger of** **apostasy—**

This is declared,

***~~1. From the very nature of the sin of apostasy itself—~~***

Consider what the sin of apostasy is. It is a discarding of the only remedy which God has provided for the necessities of fallen man. Under the Mosaic dispensation, God revealed himself to the Hebrews as the only true God; and entered into covenant with them to be their God, if they would serve him in sincerity and truth. But, if any one made void that law, verse 28, and departed from him to worship other gods—he appointed, that, upon the fact being proved by two or three witnesses, the offender would be stoned to death! [Deuteronomy 17:2-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 17.2-7). It was expressly forbidden to any person to conceal the crime: if it would have been committed by a man's dearest friend or relative, he must reveal it to the constituted authorities, and take the lead in executing sentence on the offender! [Deuteronomy 13:6-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 13.6-9).

In this law the Hebrews had acquiesced as holy, and just, and good. (Here let me suggest, by the way, that the illustration here brought by the Apostle farther shows, what the sin was of which he spoke; namely, that it was not every willful sin, but*a willful renunciation of the Gospel of Christ*.) Now, says the Apostle, if so severe a sentence was executed, without any mercy, on the despiser of the Mosaic covenant, and the judges themselves declared the offender to be "worthy of it [Deuteronomy 17:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 17.6)," "of how much sorer punishment, suppose you, shall he be thought worthy, who has renounced the Christian covenant; since he has trodden under-foot the Son of God, etc." Here he appeals to them, and makes them judges in their own cause. And to you also do I appeal. If those who renounced that legal covenant, the provisions of which were chiefly of a temporal nature, and the engagements of it ratified only with the blood of beasts, were counted worthy of such a tremendous punishment as death; of how much more severe punishment must he be worthy, who renounces the covenant of grace, in which all the blessings of grace and glory are made over to us, and which has been ratified and confirmed with the blood of God's only dear Son? I consent that you shall be judges in your own cause, and the arbiters of your own fate.

Those who renounced the law were guilty of most egregious folly and ingratitude: but their impiety was not to be compared with yours: for while, as renouncing the only means of salvation, you resemble them, your impiety is greater than theirs, in proportion as the covenant which you despise is more glorious than theirs, and the mercies which you reject have been purchased at a dearer rate.

Know then, that to such persons "there remains no more sacrifice for sins." Under the law, the sacrifices were repeated from year to year; but not so under the Gospel. Christ will never die for your sins again; nor will any other offering be made in his stead: and therefore, having renounced him, "nothing remains for you but a certain fearful looking-for of judgment," while you continue here; and "of fiery indignation," when you go hence, "that shall devour all the adversaries" of God and his Christ.

Even here, I say, the punishment of such persons is awful: for, to say the least, they are in a state of uncertainty what shall be their fate in the eternal world; and they have frequently in their minds and consciences such an anticipation of their doom, as appals their souls, and terrifies their spirits, and forms a very Hell within them: and the moment they go hence, *the wrath of an incensed God comes upon them to the uttermost!*

***~~2. From the fixed determination of God to punish it—~~***

God has said, "Vengeance belongs unto me; and I will recompense! [Deuteronomy 32:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.35)." And again, "The Lord shall judge his people, [Deuteronomy 32:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.36)." Now if he, as the moral Governor of the universe, has determined to execute justice, as well as to show mercy; and if the administering of justice be no less necessary to his own glory than the dispensing of mercy, what have the despisers of his Gospel to expect? He has said, he will thus display his righteousness at the last day: and "we know him who has said it." We know that he is *almighty*, and therefore able to inflict punishment; and we know he is *true*, and therefore will fulfill his word. It is in vain to think that he will change: for "he is not a man, that he would lie; or the son of man, that he would repent."

Seeing then that he will take the matter into his own hands, judge whether it be not "a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Were it only a mortal man that was incensed, and you had no way of escape from him, it were a terrible state for you to be in: but what must it be to be exposed to the wrath of the living God, who, while he ever lives to execute vengeance, will preserve you in existence, that you may eternally endure it! Think of enduring "the wrath of the Lamb," which will be so much the more terrible, in proportion as his mercy in submitting to be slain for you has been slighted and despised.

***~~A word of Exhortation—~~***

***~~1. Watch and pray against every willful sin—~~***

"Keep your servant from presumptuous sin," said David, "then shall I be innocent from the great transgression, [Psalm 19:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 19.13)." Now, though it is true that every willful sin, or every presumptuous sin, does not involve us in all the guilt of apostasy—yet it *leads*to apostasy as its natural end and outcome; because it hardens the heart, and sears the conscience, and grieves the Holy Spirit, and provokes God to leave us to ourselves: and, if once God says of us, "They are joined to idols; let them alone! [Hosea 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 4.17);" then our doom is sealed, and our perdition sure. Let me then affectionately entreat you to guard against every willful sin, whether of commission or omission.

A man does not become an apostate all at once:  
  
He first indulges some secret lust, some filthiness either of the flesh or mind.

Then he declines into formality in his secret walk with God.

Then his besetting sin gets an ascendant over him.

Then he becomes indifferent to public ordinances.

And so, from opposing the Gospel in his heart and life, he comes to abandon it even in profession, and to relapse into avowed infidelity, and a contempt of all true religion. The misery which such persons frequently endure in this life, is sufficient to make us dread such an event as this. But that which the apostate soul shall endure in the eternal world, surpasses all conception. It would have been better for such a one never to have known the way of righteousness, than, having known it, to desert it, and make shipwreck of his faith, [2 Peter 2:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.20-21).

***~~2. Bear in mind your obligations to Christ and to his Holy Spirit—~~***

Why did the Lord Jesus Christ die under the load of all your guilt? Was it that you might continue in your sins? Why did the Holy Spirit undertake to renew and sanctify your souls; and why has he begun a work of grace in your hearts? Was it that you might "return again with the dog to his vomit, and the sow that was washed to a wallowing in the mire?" Let then the Lord Jesus Christ behold in you the fruits of his love: and let the Holy Spirit rejoice in beholding in you the efficacy of his grace. Then it will be no formidable thing to "fall into the hands of the living God:" on the contrary, you may then with joyful hope look forward to the time of your departure, and, after the example of that Savior in whom you have believed, you may say in your dying hour, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit!"

***~~#2314~~***

***~~THE BENEFIT OF PAST EXPERIENCE~~***

***~~[Hebrews 10:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.32)~~***

"Call to remembrance the former days."

TO take a retrospect of our past lives, is the duty of every man. Without a frequent reversion to the past, no man can repent, no man believe, no man be saved. We must be sensible of our guilt and helplessness, before we can ever come aright to Christ for mercy and grace; and such a consciousness of our need of him can proceed from nothing but self-knowledge, the fruit of much self-examination and of a diligent inquiry into our own state. But it is not in this general view that we are now to consider the subject before us.

The words were addressed to those who "had been illuminated" with Divine truth, and had "endured a great fight of afflictions" in the service of their Divine Master. It is to such therefore that we propose chiefly, if not exclusively, to limit our attention, while we notice the exhortation,

***~~I. As given to the Jewish converts—~~***

They were subjected to cruel persecutions throughout the world: and they were in danger of yielding to intimidation, and of making shipwreck of their faith. To fortify their minds and encourage their hearts, he bids them "call to remembrance the former days."

***~~The former days deserved remembrance—~~***

They had been days of heavy trial to all who had embraced the Christian faith. Every convert was an object of hatred and contempt both to Jews and Gentiles. No reproaches were too bitter to cast upon the followers of Christ, no injuries were too heavy to inflict upon them. Their persons were assaulted, their property destroyed, and their lives menaced. The community of interest which all felt in the welfare of the whole body, greatly augmented the sufferings of every individual. Wherever one member suffered, all the members suffered with it.

Yet in the midst of all these afflictions, the believing Jews, as a body, had maintained their steadfastness, and held fast their profession. They had not only submitted to the loss of all things for the sake of Christ, but "had taken joyfully the spoiling of their goods;" "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for the Redeemer's sake."

To this measure of firmness they had attained by keeping their eye steadily fixed upon the heavenly state, where their portion was, and where an infinitely "better and more enduring substance" was treasured up for them. They had no doubt that their trials would be richly recompensed in the eternal world; and therefore they made light of all that they possessed below, "reckoning that the sufferings of this present time were not worthy to be compared with the glory that would be revealed in them! [Romans 8:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.18)."

Such were their former days, immediately after the light of divine truth had shone into their hearts; and,

***~~The recollection of the former days would be of singular utility to them at this time—~~***

From a review of their past experience, they would see, that, though the difficulties which they now had to sustain, or which they were daily expecting to encounter, were formidable; they were not new, nor insupportable, nor unprofitable.

They were not new, since they were no other than what had come upon them from the beginning: and consequently were not to be regarded as "strange" and unlooked for, [1 Peter 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.12).

Nor were they insupportable; for every convert had already borne them for a long period; and consequently might, with the help of divine grace, support them still.

Nor were they unprofitable; since the effect of them had been to drive the sufferers to prayer, and to bring down into their souls an increase both of grace and peace.

In a word, the tribulations which they had already endured, "had wrought patience, and experience, and hope;" and therefore, instead of trembling at the prospect of future trials, it befit every believer to hold fast the profession of his faith, and, together with that, the rejoicing of his hope firm unto the end."

What we have spoken sufficiently shows the scope of the Apostle's advice as given to the Hebrews to whom he wrote; and having ascertained that, we are prepared to consider it,

***~~II. As applicable to ourselves—~~***

That there are many among ourselves, who, through the tender mercy of our God, "have been illuminated" with divine truth, we firmly believe. And to a certain extent the same consequences have followed, and do still follow, a profession of the Gospel in these latter times, as in the days of old. To all of you then who have been illuminated, we would offer the same advice as the Apostle did to the Hebrew converts, persuaded that it will be profitable,

***~~1. For our humiliation—~~***

"Call to remembrance the former days," when you first received the knowledge of the truth, and see whether there was not much in your experience then, which may justly operate for your humiliation now. You then saw and bewailed your lost estate both by nature and practice, and gladly fled for refuge to the Lord Jesus Christ, as to the hope set before you in the Gospel. Having obtained a view of him as your Redeemer and your all-prevailing Intercessor, you rejoiced in him with joy unspeakable, so that you seemed to be come as it were into a new world! Then the cares and pleasures of this life appeared to you as empty vanities, that were scarcely worth a thought: and then, whatever you were called to suffer, whether of loss or shame, for Christ's sake, appeared to you rather a ground of joy than of sorrow, insomuch that "you took joyfully" the injuries that were inflicted on you, and rejoiced that you were counted worthy to sustain them for Jesus' sake. Nothing intimidated you; nothing was allowed to retard your progress. *With the world under your feet, and Heaven in your eye—you went on cheerfully*, and made your profiting daily to appear.

But now perhaps:  
your love has grown cold;  
your delight in the Word of God and prayer has abated;  
your exertions in the pursuit of heavenly things have languished;  
and the power of divine grace upon your souls has visibly declined.

Now your *zeal* has greatly abated.

Now the *cares of this life*have regained an ascendant over you.

Now the *frowns of the world*, which once were disregarded, have become formidable in your eyes.

Now the fear of suffering loss in your worldly interests dampens all your ardor.

Now, instead of being altogether crucified to the world, and living only unto God, as in former days—you can scarcely be distinguished, except by an outward profession, from those who were never yet irradiated by the light of Gospel truth!

Is this an uncommon case? Would to God it were! But what we see in the Church of Ephesus of old is yet visible, wherever the Gospel has been long preached. Of them the Lord Jesus says, "You have borne, and have had patience, and for my name's sake have labored, and have not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against you, because you have left your first love!" "Remember therefore from whence you are fallen; and repent, and do the first works! [Revelation 2:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.3-5)."

So then say I to you: "Call to remembrance the former days:" remember what you once were, and what your former works: and let the view of your spiritual declension fill you with shame and sorrow and contrition. Be afraid and tremble, lest the Lord withdraw from you the light with which you have been illumined; and beg of him to return in mercy to your souls, and to "strengthen in you the things which remain, and are ready to die, [Revelation 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.2)."

***~~2. For your encouragement—~~***

It may be that either outwardly from men, or inwardly from Satan, you are strongly tempted at this time, and need to have a word of consolation and encouragement spoken to your souls. If this be the case, "Call to remembrance the former days."

Trials have not for the first time come upon you now—you have in a greater or less degree experienced them from the time that you were first illuminated. Who is it then that strengthened you to bear them at that time? Is he not still as able and as willing to help you as ever? Is not the grace of Christ as sufficient for you now as in former days? And does he not deserve as much at your hands now as he did formerly? If you rejoiced in doing so for him years ago, is there not the same reason that you would do so now? If there was "a need that you would be in heaviness through manifold trials" formerly, [1 Peter 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.6), may there not be the same occasion still? And if the "trial of your faith was precious to you heretofore, yes more precious than gold, because you knew it would be found to your praise and honor and glory, as well as to the praise and honor and glory of your Lord at his appearing, [1 Peter 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.7)," should it not be alike precious now?

If too an assured prospect of "a better and an enduring substance in Heaven" once made all earthly things appear to you so light, that you could take joyfully the loss of all of them in the prospect of it—is it not of equal value now? Or do you think that, when you shall have obtained the enjoyment of it, you will regret the sacrifices which you made with a view to it?"

Then I say, "Continue to walk by the rule whereunto you have attained, [Philippians 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.16);" and "look to yourselves that you lose not the things which you have wrought, but that you receive a full reward, 2 John, verse 8."

***~~Let me improve the subject in a more particular address—~~***

***~~1. To those who have never yet been illuminated by the Gospel of Christ—~~***

How painful would the review of former days be to you! O! the seasons you have lost! the mercies you have abused! the guilt you have contracted! How differently have your lives been spent from what they would have been if you had been Christians indeed! You would have been fleeing from the wrath to come, and would have so made your light shine before men, as to "condemn the world" around you, even as Noah did when he built the ark: and you would have found in Christ such peace as passes understanding, and such joy as would have infinitely overbalanced all that you could ever do or suffer for him.

But of persecution for righteousness' sake you know nothing; and still less of that high attainment of glorying in tribulation for the sake of Christ.

Look back then to the days that are past, and be confounded before God because of your impiety: and pray that "the eyes of your understanding may be enlightened," and that you may yet be "brought out of darkness into the marvelous light of his Gospel." Be thankful to God that the light yet shines around you: and, "while you have the light, be careful to walk in the light;" and "give glory to the Lord your God before he causes darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and, while you look for light, he turns it into the shadow of death, and makes it gross darkness.

But, if you will not hear this admonition, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride; and my eye shall weep sore and run down day and night," because of the awful judgments that await you, [Jeremiah 13:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 13.16-17).

***~~2. To those who, though illuminated by the Gospel, are not walking in the enjoyment of the Divine presence—~~***

This may arise from *temptation*and spiritual *declension*, or from *sloth*and *carnality*, and *worldly-mindedness*. If it have arisen from the former, God forbid that I would "break the bruised reed, or quench the smoking flax:" let me rather "hold up the hands that hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees, and encourage the fearful heart."

I well know that the soul of a righteous man may be bowed down with spiritual distress, and be so sore troubled under the hidings of God's face, as to be deaf to the voice of consolation. Such was the state of David at one time [Psalm 77:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.2-4); and the remedy to which he betook himself was precisely that which is recommended in my text. "I considered," says he, "the days of old, the years of ancient times. I call to remembrance my song in the night, [Psalm 77:5-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.5-10)." Then comparing his present painful experience with that which he had formerly enjoyed, he acknowledges, that all his present doubts and fears were the result of "his own infirmity." And then, to prevent the return of any such distressing apprehensions, he adds, "I will remember the works of the Lord; surely I will remember your wonders of old! [Psalm 77:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.11)."

Thus you should do—call to remembrance the experience of former saints, and your own also at more favored seasons: and then bear in mind that, though you change, God is the same, and that "with him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

But if, as in too many instances is the case, your darkness arises from a relaxation of your diligence, and an indulgence of worldly or carnal affections; I must "change my voice, for I stand in doubt of you;" and would have you also stand in doubt of yourselves, until it be clear that "Christ is truly formed in you."

If you are drawing back from God in secret, beware lest he leaves you to yourselves to "go back to everlasting perdition." To "have run well for a season," will be of little avail, if you do not press forward in your heavenly course. The threatening denounced against backsliding Ephesus lies in full force against you; and you will do well to take heed to it. "I will come unto you quickly," says Christ, "and will remove your candlestick, unless you repent!" Oh, return from all your backslidings with penitential sorrow and a living faith; so shall your backslidings be healed; and "so iniquity shall not be your ruin!"

***~~3. To those who are walking steadfastly in their Christian course—~~***

Are you under trials? Every day brings you nearer to the termination of them. Your Lord and Savior is just ready to set the crown of victory upon your head, and to put you into full possession of that better and enduring substance that awaits you. Look up to Heaven and see the myriads that are now around the throne. "Whence came they? They all came out of *great tribulation*, and washed their robes white in the blood of the Lamb! Therefore they are before the throne of God, [Revelation 7:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 7.14-15)." And therefore shall you soon join their company, and unite with them in songs of praise to God and to the Lamb for ever. Only "be faithful unto death, and God will give you a crown of life," according to that sure word of promise, "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." "He is faithful who has promised, who also will do it" in its appointed time!

***~~#2315~~***

***~~PATIENT FORTITUDE REQUIRED~~***

***~~[Hebrews 10:35-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.35-36)~~***

"So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised."

THERE have been, to the Church of Christ, seasons of bitter persecution, and seasons of comparative tolerance and peace: but in whichever of these states we are, it befits us not to yield to dejection on the one hand, or undue security on the other. We are soldiers on the field of battle, and must be ready to encounter our enemies whenever they may advance against us. It will be time enough to put off our armor, when we have received our dismissal from an earthly warfare, and are crowned with laurels in the realms of bliss!

There had been to the Hebrew Christians seasons of severe trial, which the Apostle called to their remembrance: and it is probable, that when this epistle was written to them they enjoyed somewhat of tranquility: but he bade them not to cast away their confidence: since they would still have need of it, as long as they would continue in the body.

In this apostolic injunction we see,

***~~I. What state of mind befits the Christian—~~***

***~~The "confidence" here spoken of is a holy boldness in confessing Christ—~~***

This is essential to the Christian character. Not even faith itself will avail for our salvation, where this is lacking: "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)." "If we are ashamed of Christ, and deny him, he will be ashamed of us, and deny us, [Matthew 10:32-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.32-33)."

This holy fortitude we should maintain under all circumstances. Never, for a moment, should we "cast it away." If trials increase, we need it the more: if they abate, or even cease, we still need this divine quality; because we know not how soon it may be called for, or to what an extent it may be required.

***~~This "confidence" will bring its own reward along with it—~~***

It will keep us from all that disquietude and distraction which the menaces of the world might occasion in an unstable mind. It will induce a consistency of conduct, under all circumstances; and will bring into the soul, stability and peace. It will be to him who exercises it an unquestionable evidence of his own sincerity; and will doubtless be honored with peculiar manifestations of the Divine favor. If more than ordinary supports are called for by reason of the augmented troubles that assault us, they shall be given to us; even as they were to the Hebrew Youths in the furnace, when the Son of God himself condescended visibly to appear in their behalf.

To every Christian is this requisite, because of,

***~~II. The occasion he will have for this confidence—~~***

Different as may be the path of different persons in some respects, in their great outline they are all the same. In their progress, all these different steps may be clearly and distinctly seen:

***~~1. Duty—~~***

Every Christian "does the will of God." To believe in Christ, to receive everything from Christ in the exercise of faith and prayer, and to give himself up to God without reserve; this is the one habit of his mind, and the one labor of his life. From day to day he does not his own will, or the will of an ungodly world; but the will of God, as it is revealed in his blessed word.

***~~2. Suffering—~~***

This will always more or less attend a faithful discharge of our duty to God. There will now, as formerly, be seasons of comparative peace: but it is not possible for unregenerate men to love the light, whether it be set before them in the word, or be exhibited before them in the conduct of God's faithful servants. "The servant cannot be greater than his Lord:" if they called the Master of the house Beelzebub, those of his household must assuredly expect some opprobrious designation at the least. And though, in comparison with imprisonment and death, this may be regarded as a light matter; yet is it not light, when we consider that the names with which the godly are designated, are a signal for the world to load them with every species of obloquy and contempt.

***~~3. Patience—~~***

Our blessed Lord was "as a sheep led to the slaughter," and, in the midst of all the indignities that were offered him, "opened not his mouth." And in this manner his faithful followers also "possess their souls in patience." They expect that they shall "have need of patience;" and it is their endeavor so to demean themselves under their trials, that "patience may have its perfect work; so that they may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing."

***~~4. Glory—~~***

This is the object of their pursuit; and to this they press forward with all their might. They know, that "if they draw back, it must be unto perdition;" and that it is by believing only, and maintaining their faith with steadfastness, that they ever can be saved, verses 38, 39. They are well assured that the means must be used for the attainment of the end; and that if used aright, the end shall be attained. They are well aware that duty must be performed, suffering expected, patience exercised: and in this way they have no doubt but that glory shall be ultimately secured. "By a patient continuance in well-doing, they seek, and will obtain, eternal life."

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

***~~1. Let us be thankful for the peace that we are privileged to enjoy—~~***

These are days of extraordinary toleration and candor. We cannot indeed say that "the offense of the cross has ceased:" for it never can cease, as long as the ungodly constitute the great majority of the world. But persecution, except in private circles, is but little known. The flames of martyrdom are no longer kindled among us, as in the days of old. Let us, then, make a due improvement of this great mercy, for the more abundant edification of our own souls, and for a more active advancement of Christ's kingdom in the world. See [Acts 9:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.31).

***~~2. Let us, however, stand prepared for other days—~~***

No one can tell how soon the face of things may be changed. If Popery were to gain an ascendant again, it should, in all probability, bring with it all its attendant horrors. But even in private life we may be called to make severe sacrifices, and to suffer the loss of all our prospects upon earth. But let us remember, that Heaven will richly repay us for all that we may either lose or suffer: and if only we "receive at last the promise" of eternal life, we shall never have reason to regret the "patience" we exercised, and the "confidence" we maintained.

***~~#2316~~***

***~~THE TRUE MEANS OF PERSEVERING TO THE END~~***

***~~[Hebrews 10:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.38-39)~~***

"But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him." But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved."

*TRIALS are the portion of all the people of God.* Times and circumstances may occasion a considerable difference as to the measure in which individual believers may be called to endure them: but to all, without exception, it must still be said, as well as to the Hebrews of old, "You have need of patience, that, after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise." To all may the same consolation also be administered; namely, that our Lord and Savior will speedily come to the relief of his afflicted people; and that, if only we believe in him we shall assuredly be saved.

The words in which the Apostle thus consoled the Hebrews, are taken from the Prophet Habakkuk; who was himself comforted with this assurance, when bewailing and deprecating the calamities which were about to be brought upon the Jewish nation by their Chaldean enemies, [Habakkuk 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 1.6); [Habakkuk 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 1.12); [Habakkuk 2:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 2.2-4).

These words are applicable to the Church of God in all ages; since that same almighty Savior, who promised to interpose in behalf of his believing people then, still engages to be their support in the time of trouble, and only requires that they would look to him with humble and assured confidence, that their trust in him shall not be in vain.

To this consolatory declaration the Apostle adds a most solemn caution, that, if any be turned back from God by means of their trials, it will be to their everlasting perdition!

That the warning may come more distinctly before you, I will endeavor to show,

***~~I. The way to eternal life—~~***

This is the same in all ages: we must live by faith alone. Whatever our own personal character may have been, we must look to God as "the Author and Giver of all good;" and on him as reconciled to us in the Son of his love, we must rely for a supply of all that we need either for body or for soul, for time or for eternity.

***~~By faith we are first introduced into the divine life—~~***

From the manner in which the Apostle quotes this prophecy in other places, it is evident that the sense of it is more large and comprehensive than we would of ourselves have imagined. In the Epistles to the Romans and to the Galatians, Paul enters fully and argumentatively upon the subject of a sinner's justification before God; and shows, in opposition to all the erroneous notions both of Jews and Gentiles, that it is not by works of any kind, whether ceremonial or moral, but simply and entirely by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. In both these epistles too, he not only adduces this prophecy as confirming his doctrine, but he lays a peculiar stress upon it, as establishing his doctrine beyond all contradiction, [Romans 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.17) and [Galatians 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.11). Know then, as a matter of primary importance, that,*if ever you would live before God, you must come to him as sinners destitute of all help or hope in yourselves, and must cast yourselves entirely upon that Savior*, "whom he has set forth to be an atoning sacrifice for sin," and "not for your sins only, but also for the sins of the world." There is no other way in which any man can come to God, [John 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.6); nor any other name but that of Jesus, whereby any sinner in the universe can be saved, [Acts 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.12).

***~~By faith also we must persevere in it even to the end—~~***

There is no other way for our continuance in spiritual life, than that by which we are first brought into a state of spiritual existence. As at the beginning it is said, "He who has the Son of God has life; and he who has not the Son of God has not life, [1 John 5:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.12);" so must it be said even to the end: for "all our fresh springs are in him:" "He is the fountain of life; and in his light alone we can see light."

Have we continually *fresh sins*to be forgiven? There is no way of being cleansed from them but by washing continually in "the fountain which has been once opened for sin and impurity, [Zechariah 13:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 13.1)."

Have we on account of our *remaining corruptions*continual need of fresh supplies of grace? There is no other source of grace but Jesus: "it has pleased the Father that in him would all fullness dwell [Colossians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.19)," and "out of his fullness must we all receive, even grace upon grace [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16)."

Are our *trials*and *afflictions*multiplied from time to time? It is in his everlasting arms that we must be upheld, and "his grace alone that can be sufficient for us."

In a word, it is "by faith that we must stand" every moment, [Romans 11:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.20), "by faith too we must walk, [2 Corinthians 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.7)." Yes, from first to last, "we must live altogether by 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)." "As we have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so we must walk in him, rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith as we have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving, [Colossians 2:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.6-7)."

But in order to maintain our steadfastness in this way, it is necessary we would consider,

***~~II. The danger of departing from it—~~***

On few passages of Scripture do we behold more glaring perversions than in comments upon these words. Some, in order to uphold a favorite system, will deny that the persons here cautioned against apostasy are the same as are spoken of in the preceding and following context. But I entreat you, brethren, never so to wrest the Word of God. *Take the word as little children, without inquiring what human system it appears to favor; and let it have all the force which it evidently bears in the passage from whence it is taken*. If you cannot reconcile different parts of God's blessed word, leave that to him, saying, "What I know not now, I shall know hereafter." It is plain that every man, whatever his attainments are, has need of this solemn warning.

It is evident beyond all contradiction, that many, after having long professed to believe in Christ, and some also of the most distinguished attainments in religion, have gone back, and made shipwreck of their faith! Paul himself felt a need of exercising continual watchfulness and self-denial, "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)." Consider then, all of you, the danger of turning back from the good way in which you are now walking:

***~~1. You will inexpressibly grieve and offend your God—~~***

God says, "My soul shall have no pleasure in you." In the humble and steadfast saint he has great delight, "he takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his mercy [Psalm 147:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 147.11)." But if any man stops striving to live a holy life—then how can God take pleasure in him? While walking steadfastly and uprightly before God, the believer complies with all God's gracious designs, and furthers, to that extent at least, the glory of God's name. But when he draws back from God, he proclaims to all around him, that, in his estimation at least, God is not so worthy to be loved and served as once he had thought him to be; and that, after a full estimate of their respective claims, the world and the flesh are deserving of at least an equal regard with him, if not also a superior regard. Now, I ask, can a jealous God look with delight on such a man? Should even a fellow-creature, when once admitted into the nearest relation to us, be satisfied with such an avowal?

But the words in my text are intended to convey much more than they express: they import that God will look upon such a backslider as an object of his utter abhorrence. This is more plainly declared in the book of Revelation; where the Lord Jesus Christ, addressing the Laodicean Church, says, "I wish that you were cold or hot: but because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue you out of my mouth! [Revelation 3:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.15-16)." This shows us the true light in which God views "the backslider in heart;" he loathes and abhors him as a base ungrateful wretch, who has ceased to behave himself wisely, and has "returned, like a dog to his vomit, and like a sow that has been washed to her wallowing in the mire."

***~~2. You will infallibly destroy your own soul—~~***

So says my text: those who draw back, "draw back unto perdition!" O what a fearful thought! Who can tell all that is implied in the word "perdition?" It is remarkable, that the day of judgment is expressly called, "the day of the perdition of ungodly men, [2 Peter 3:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.7);" and so indeed it will prove.

*Now*the ungodly have the upper hand, and do what they can to destroy the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom in the world. But *then*the Judge of living and dead will deal with them, and recompense upon their heads all the evil that they have done. But on none will so severe a doom be inflicted as on those who "have forsaken the right way," and "after having once escaped the pollutions of the world, have been again entangled therein and overcome: with them the latter end will be worse than the beginning! [2 Peter 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.10); [2 Peter 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.15); [2 Peter 2:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.20-21)."

Yet, though the danger of falling is such as may well excite in us a holy watchfulness, it need not generate in us a slavish fear: since God engages to uphold the upright in heart: and they are therefore warranted in expecting from him all needful aid.

That we may not unnecessarily make the heart of the righteous sad, we shall endeavor to mark,

***~~III. When our actual progress in the way of life has been such as will warrant a good hope of our continuance in it to the end.~~***

But here we must not take a high standard, since the Apostle's confidence referred not to himself only, but to the great mass of the believing Hebrews throughout the world. If then it is asked: Who they are who may hope to persevere in the good way? I answer,

***~~1. Those who are still advancing in the face of difficulties—~~***

Where there is nothing to try our faith and patience, no conclusions can be drawn respecting the principle of grace that is within us. But when we are fighting against the world, and the flesh, and the devil, and maintaining the conflict undismayed, we may be sure that God is truly with us: and a certainty that "God has begun a good work within us, is a just ground of confidence, that he will carry it on, and perfect it to the end, [Philippians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.6)." God has promised that "he will keep the feet of his saints:" and that "the righteous shall hold on his way, and he who has clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger." If then we have an evidence within ourselves, that we are indeed endeavoring to approve ourselves to God in a holy and consistent conduct, we need not alarm ourselves about future trials, but may safely and confidently commit the keeping of our souls to God, assured, that he will order everything for us, and that "as our day of trial is, so shall our strength to meet it be."

***~~2. Those who regard the salvation of their souls as that one object which they are determined at all events to attain—~~***

If a man has not thoroughly learned that lesson, that his soul is of more value than the whole world, it matters not what his present attainments are; he has no security whatever against a speedy and final apostasy. But, if he is determined in his heart, that, whatever come, he will not barter away his soul, or allow the salvation of it to be compromised, that man will stand: "he has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from him." The faith of such a one may be but weak at present; but it shall prevail at last: and because he believes to the valuing of his soul, his faith will operate to the saving of his soul.

Lower than this we cannot go; but thus low we must: for*it is not the measure of a man's attainments, so much as the reality of his faith*, that we are concerned to inquire after. It is the Lord Jesus Christ alone who can carry on the work effectually in the heart even of the most advanced Christian: and if he sees in the least and basest of his people, that their hearts are upright towards him, "he will carry the lambs in his bosom," and "allow none to pluck them out of his hands."

***~~Be persuaded now to bear in mind,~~***

***~~1. That there is in the mind of God, an immense difference between man and man—~~***

Here we are all together; and the world sees little difference between us. But on some, God looks with pleasure and delight; and on others, with aversion and abhorrence. Yes, if there is one among us that is poor and of a contrite spirit, God says, "To that man will I look." And he will look on him with unutterable delight, insomuch that his very "soul" shall be refreshed with the sight of him.

See this poor despised creature, whom man regards as "the filth of the world and the off-scouring of all things." He has a beauty in God's eyes, which makes him lovely beyond all conception: his every word and thought are so dear to God, that he listens to it with delight, and records it in the book of his remembrance, and anticipates with joy the period when he shall have an opportunity of testifying before the whole assembled universe his love for him, [Malachi 3:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.16-17). *No bridegroom ever so rejoiced over his bride, as he does over this creature that is bemoaning his own unworthiness*, [Isaiah 62:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 62.5). No monarch conceives himself so enriched by the most splendid diadem, as God does by this acquisition to his family, [Isaiah 62:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 62.3). He contemplates with inconceivable delight the prospect of securing to himself the everlasting possession of one in whom he takes so deep an interest, [Jeremiah 32:40-41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 32.40-41).

But is it thus that he looks on all? Alas! alas! we read of many, whom the world accounts blessed, whom yet "his soul abhors! [Psalm 10:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 10.3)." On them indeed his eye is fixed, as well as on others; but "it is upon them for evil and not for good;" and the only delight which he feels respecting them is, "Ah! I will ease me of my adversaries: their foot shall slide in due time." "I will whet my sword, and will make my arrows drunk with their blood! [Deuteronomy 32:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.19-20); [Deuteronomy 32:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.35); [Deuteronomy 32:40-42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.40-42)."

Do not think that God is the same to all—indeed he is not. If to some he is a God of love and mercy, to others "he is a consuming fire!" Ah! beloved, when will you believe this? When will you realize this thought? When will you ask: What are God's views of me? what are his thoughts towards me? Could you but be persuaded to do this, we might yet hope to see you humbled before God, and God's soul delighting in you.

***~~2. That there is, and will be, a corresponding difference between men in the eternal world—~~***

Not only of the world at large are there millions "perishing for lack of knowledge," but even of the Church; and of those who once appeared in a hopeful way, are multitudes "drawing back unto perdition." How little do both the one and the other of these imagine what awaits them at the moment of their departure hence! Could they conceive it, how would they now be filled with horror! How would their spirits sink within them! How earnest would they be in their inquiries: "What must I do to be saved?"

Truly they would no longer be so mirthful, and easy, and secure, as they now are: nor, if we had a just view of their condition, could we speak of them but with floods of tears.

Ah! brethren, when will you believe that such a thing is possible? When will you believe that such a thing is true? But true it is, whether you will believe it or not! I pray God, you may so believe it on the report of the Gospel, as never to taste it by bitter experience.

But of others there are a goodly number, (O! that God would multiply them a hundred-fold!) who are "believing in Christ to the saving of their souls." They are already brought out of Egypt, and are pursuing their journey steadily through this dreary wilderness to the promised land. They meet with difficulties; but they are not discouraged. They go on in the strength of the Lord Jesus Christ: and speedily will they attain the great end of their faith, even the everlasting salvation of their souls! O who can estimate aright their prospects? Happy, happy people!

How shall we attempt to describe the blessedness that awaits you? What a Heaven will burst upon the soul at the first instant of its departure from the body! And what inconceivable bliss will it enjoy in the immediate and everlasting fruition of its God! But I must forbear. In attempting to expatiate on such a subject, I am only darkening counsel by words without knowledge. But do you, my beloved brethren, have worthy thoughts of your high calling; and labor night and day to walk worthy of it.

These things may to many appear as a cunningly-devised fable: but know, all of you, that they are the very truth of God; and that, of the multitudes who are now around you, there will soon be many weeping and wailing and gnashing their teeth in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone!

Others who have been plucked as brands out of the burning, will be seated upon thrones of glory, and singing everlasting Hallelujahs to God and to the Lamb!

***~~3. That the one great line of distinction between them is "faith"—~~***

It is by "faith that the just live;" and it is by unbelief that all others are excluded from the kingdom of Heaven. Faith is indeed a hidden principle: but it is strongly operative, wherever it exists; and wherever it operates aright, will assuredly be productive of all the benefits which are here traced to it.

But, notwithstanding all that is said of this principle in the Holy Scriptures, and the indispensable necessity of it to the salvation of the soul—how few condemn themselves for their lack of it! How few pray to God for it, or are even conscious of their need of it!*What greater proof can there be of the blindness with which Satan has blinded the whole world!*Men will readily enough acknowledge their need of holiness; but of faith they feel no need: they think they have as much of it as is necessary for their salvation. But, if they would only *see how totally inoperative their supposed faith is, they would see at once that they are as destitute of real faith as are even the beasts that perish!*

Dear brethren, be aware of this: and cry mightily to God to impart unto you this spiritual gift. Faith is, in all who have it, the gift of God. No man can produce faith in his own heart: it is not a mere conviction founded upon reasoning, but a principle infused into the soul: and it is by that living principle alone you can ever be brought to a state of acceptance with God in this world, and the enjoyment of his favor in the world to come! May God in his mercy create faith in all our hearts! and may its fruits within us now be a pledge of its yet richer blessings in the realms of glory!

***~~#2317~~***

***~~THE NATURE OF FAITH~~***

***~~[Hebrews 11:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.1)~~***

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

Considering how much the Scriptures speak of faith, one is surprised that the subject of faith so little occupies the attention of the world at large, or even of the religious world. But the truth is, that the nature of faith is but little known. The world at large consider it as no more than assent upon evidence; while the religious world confine their views of it almost exclusively to the office of justifying the soul before God. But faith is of a far more comprehensive nature than even good men generally suppose. Faith extends to everything that has been revealed; and is *the one principle that actuates the Christian in every part of the divine life*.

The description given of faith in our text has been frequently misunderstood. The precise import of the passage will best appear by considering the context. The Apostle is encouraging the believing Hebrews to hold fast their profession. He tells them that faith is the only principle that will enable them to do this: he then proceeds to show them in a great variety of instances, how faith will act, and how certainly, if duly exercised, it will prevail for the carrying of them forward even to the end.

It is in this general view, and not in the light of justifying the soul, that the Apostle calls it, "the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen."

Let us then in this enlarged sense consider,

***~~I. The nature of faith—~~***

***~~Within its proper and legitimate scope is all that God has revealed in his blessed word—~~***

Faith comprehends within its grasp the past, the present, and the future.

By faith, the Christian knows that the universe, but a few thousand years ago, had no existence, and that it was created out of nothing by the Word of God.

By faith, he sees everything upheld and ordered by the hand that formed it, and not so much as a hair of our head falling to the ground without his special permission.

By faith, he foresees that all the human race which have in successive ages passed away, shall be recalled into existence at the last day, and be judged according to their works.

But more particularly faith views that great mysterious work, the work of redemption. It beholds the plan formed in the eternal councils of the Father and of the Son; and in due season with gradually increasing light revealed to man. It sees the incarnation, the death, the resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the sending forth of the Holy Spirit in all his miraculous and new-creating powers, to attest that the work was finished, and to render it effectual for the salvation of a ruined world.

This work it still beholds carrying on in Heaven by the Lord Jesus as our great High-priest within the veil, and as the living and life-giving Head of his Church and people. And, carrying its eye forward to future ages, it sees the Redeemer's kingdom universally established, and every subject of his empire seated with him upon his throne of glory!

Faith beholds all intermediate matters fulfilled in their season, and is assured, that, of everything that God has spoken, not one jot or tittle shall ever fall to the ground.

***~~Of all this faith brings a full conviction to the mind, and, as far as it can be desired, a full experience to the soul—~~***

Faith is "the evidence of things not seen." By "evidence" is meant such a proof as silences all objections. Of the past, the present, or the future, what could reason declare? Nothing with any certainty. Of the mystery of redemption more especially, it could determine nothing. With our bodily senses we could ascertain nothing. Everything is apprehended by faith alone.

Yet is it therefore uncertain? No! it is as clear to the mind of a believer, as if it had been demonstrated to his reason, or subjected to his sight. Having assured himself from reason, that the Scriptures are the Word of God, and that the great mystery of redemption, as apprehended by him, is revealed in them, he has no doubt concerning it.

His fall in Adam;  
his recovery by Christ;  
his restoration to the Divine image through the influences of the Holy Spirit  
—these things appear so worthy of God, and so suitable to man, that no doubt respecting them exists in the mind: and all the objections which pride and ignorance have raised against them are scattered like mists before the rising sun.

But it is not only as true that faith presents these things to the mind, but as good, as desirable, and as promised: and it so apprehends them, as to give them an actual existence in the soul: it is "the substance of things hoped for." These things, as far as they are good, and future—are the objects of hope; and therefore, as we might suppose, unpossessed. But, though future, they are made present by the exercise of faith; and, though only hoped for, are actually enjoyed. This is a wonderful property of faith. Consolations, victories, triumphs, glory, though remote in ultimate experience, are by anticipation rendered present, so that the first-fruits, the pledge, the foretaste are in actual possession; and while the grapes of Eschol assure the soul of the final possession of our inheritance, the views of Pisgah transport it thither, and enable it to realize its most enlarged hopes and expectations.

From this description of faith we may see,

***~~II. Faith's aspect on the welfare and stability of the soul—~~***

As entering into every part of the divine life, faith's influence might be pointed out in an almost infinite variety of particulars. But we will content ourselves with specifying two, which will, to a certain degree, give an insight into all:

***~~1. Faith renders us comparatively indifferent to the concerns of time and sense—~~***

While we are in the body we cannot be *absolutely*indifferent to earthly things; but *comparatively*we may. The unbeliever has respect to nothing else: he sees nothing, knows nothing, cares for nothing, but what is visible and temporal. He is "of the flesh," and "savors only the things of the flesh." His hopes, his fears, his joys, his sorrows, are altogether carnal.

So it once was with the believer: but it is now so no longer. By faith he now views other things, which fully occupy his mind, and engage all the powers of his soul. Earthly vanities once appeared as grand and glorious as the starry heavens. But they are fled from his sight: they are all eclipsed by the splendor of the Sun of Righteousness which has arisen upon his soul. There indeed they are; and were the light of God's truth withdrawn from his soul, they would again resume a measure of their former importance. But they are now reduced to insignificance: and the things which "once appeared glorious in his eyes, have now no glory by reason of the glory that excels."

Ignorant persons are ready to impute the believer's withdrawment from the world to superstition, to moroseness, to pride, to wild enthusiasm, to gloom and melancholy. But *he renounces the world as an empty vanity, and an ensnaring "lie," that deceives all who follow it, and ruins all who trust in it.*Once "a deceived heart had turned him aside, so that he could not deliver his soul, or say: Is there not a lie in my right hand?" but now he knows, that what he formerly grasped, was a mere shadow; and that there is nothing substantial but what is apprehended by faith. Hence "What was once gain to him, is now accounted loss; yes all things are now but as dung, that he may win Christ, and be found in him."

Such are now his views of the cross of Christ, and of the glory that shall be revealed, that "the world is crucified to him, and he is crucified unto the world! [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.14)."

***~~2. Faith strengthens us both for action and for suffering in the service of our God—~~***

Before faith has brought a man to a view of the things which are invisible and eternal, he has no zeal for God, no fortitude to suffer shame for the sake of Christ. But when once the realities of the eternal world are open to his view; when once Heaven with all its glory, and Hell with all its terrors, are apprehended by him; who shall stop him? Who shall intimidate him? Who shall persuade him? Bid him relax his diligence, and give way to carnal ease and pleasure; he will say, 'Go, offer your advice to one that is running in a race, or fighting for his life: will he listen to you? Expect not me then to listen, who am running for eternity, and fighting for my soul.'

Is he called to suffer? He knows for whose sake it is that he is called to take up his cross; and he takes it up with cheerfulness, and "rejoices that he is counted worthy to bear it." Has he made considerable advance in the ways of God? He does not on that account relax; but "forgetting what is behind, and reaching forward to that which is ahead, he presses on towards the mark for the prize of his high calling of God in Christ Jesus, [Philippians 3:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.13-14)." These are the things which are chiefly insisted on throughout the whole of this chapter: and, as such were the operations of faith in the days of old, such also they are at this hour; and such will they be to the very end of time.

***~~Application—~~***

***~~1. How little there is of true faith in the world?~~***

If you will believe the report which men give of themselves, there is no lack of faith at all. Everyone who calls himself a Christian, considers it as a matter of course that he possesses faith.

But how would faith *operate*under other circumstances? Let a man believe that a house in which he is sitting is on fire; or that a vessel in which he is embarked is ready to sink; will he not evince the truth of his faith by some efforts to escape? But here men profess to believe all that God has spoken about the danger of their souls, and the way opened for their deliverance—and yet are as unconcerned about either the one or the other as the beasts that perish! Alas! how fearfully do they deceive their own souls!

But even in the religious world there is an awful lack of faith. For how little are men *actuated*by the truths which they profess to believe! How strong is the hold which earthly things yet retain of the believer's soul, and how faint are his impressions of eternity! Well might our Lord say, "When the Son of man comes, shall he find faith on the earth? [Luke 18:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.8)." Know brethren, that "if you had faith but as a grain of mustard-seed, it would remove mountains:" and, consequently, *you may judge of the smallness of your faith by the slender effects which it has produced upon your souls*. Pray then to Him who alone can give you faith, "Lord, help my unbelief;" "Lord, increase my faith."

***~~2. In what way alone you can hope to vanquish all your spiritual enemies?~~***

It is "by faith that you are to walk, and not by sight." In order to form a correct judgment of things, listen not to the report of sense, but consult the testimony of faith. *Send faith as a spy to search out the heavenly land that is before you*. If you attend to the voice of unbelief, it will tell you of nothing but Anakim that are invincible, and "of cities that are walled up to Heaven." But if you ask for the account which faith will give, it will tell you, "They are bread for us! [Numbers 14:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 14.9)," and shall be as easily devoured, and as profitably to our souls, as the food that is put into our mouths.

What the effect of this principle shall be upon your souls, you may see in the case of the Apostle Paul. Greater trials than his, you cannot expect to encounter: and greater supports you cannot need. But whence arose his supports? He was animated by "a spirit of faith:" by that, he foresaw the outcome of his conflicts: and by that he was upheld: and, through the influence of that, all his afflictions appeared but light and momentary, yes, and the very means of augmenting his happiness and glory! [2 Corinthians 4:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.8-9); [2 Corinthians 4:13-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.13-18).

Thus shall faith operate in you: it shall "work by love:" it shall "purify the heart;" it shall "overcome the world, [1 John 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.4)." Only "live by faith:" and if at any time you be ready to stagger through unbelief, remember that "he is faithful who has promised;" and "be strong in faith, giving glory to God." For of this you may be perfectly assured, that *the more lively your faith is, the more abundant will be its fruits*; and that in every hour of trial "according to your faith it will be done unto you."

***~~#2318~~***

***~~ABEL'S OFFERING INSTRUCTIVE TO US~~***

***~~[Hebrews 11:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.4)~~***

"By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead."

IN reading the history of the saints under the Old Testament dispensation, we are constrained to admire their conduct on many occasions, and to regard them as excellent patterns for our imitation. But we would not readily have traced all their diversified excellencies to one principle, and still less to the principle of faith, if it had not been done for us by an inspired writer. But, now that it is done, we see the truth, and the importance too, of the suggestion; and are stirred up to cultivate the same principle in order to the attainment of their virtues.

The Apostle, in adducing instances of the power of faith from the beginning of the world to the close of the Jewish records, omits all mention of Adam, who, we doubt not, both lived and died in faith. But his aim in this part of his epistle is to encourage the believing Hebrews to persevere in their holy profession, notwithstanding all the trials to which they might be subjected on account of it: and, as nothing particular is recorded concerning Adam's faith, and Abel was a martyr for the faith, it was more to his purpose to commence his catalogue of worthies with the name of Abel; of whose offering we are now more particularly called to speak. To illustrate what the Apostle says concerning it, I shall show,

***~~I. In what consisted the peculiar excellence of Abel's offering, as contrasted with that of Cain—~~***

By referring to the account given us in the book of Genesis, we find,

***~~1. That Abel's offering differed widely from that of Cain—~~***

Cain brought only "of the fruits of the ground, [Genesis 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 4.3)." Now this he might have done even in Paradise; since it was only a tribute of gratitude towards his heavenly Benefactor, and an acknowledgment of dependence on him for a continuance of his favors.

But Abel brought "of the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat, [Genesis 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 4.4)," by which he acknowledged himself a sinner deserving of death, and his hope of mercy only through the intervention of a vicarious sacrifice. By this act, he professed his faith in that Savior who was in due time to die for the sins of the world, and whom the sacrificial ordinances already instituted were intended to prefigure. That sacrifices had been ordained by God, is evident, from its being said that Abel offered his sacrifice "by faith:" for had Abel offered this sacrifice of his own mind, there could have been no scope for the exercise of faith; since faith necessarily has respect to some divine declaration; and in this instance must have had respect to a command from God to present such an offering, and a promise from God to accept it.

When the command was first given, we are not certainly informed: but I conceive it to have been immediately after the Fall, when, as we are told, "the Lord God made coats of skins to clothe" our first parents, [Genesis 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.21). It is evident that living creatures were then slain; and slain by God's command: and, if we suppose those living creatures then offered in sacrifice, we have the most complete exhibition of the way of salvation that is contained in all the sacred records: since, as the sin of our first parents was atoned for by the blood of those sacrifices, and the shame of their nakedness was covered by their skins—so are our sins expiated by the blood of our great Sacrifice, and our souls are clothed in the robe of his unspotted righteousness.

At all events the fact is clear, that such an institution had been formed by God; or else Abel's faith could not have had respect to it: and no other period for the commencement of it seems so proper as that to which we have referred, because it is the only period mentioned in the inspired history, and because, if not instituted until the time of Abel, our first parents must have been left many years without that instruction and consolation which such an ordinance was calculated to convey.

It is evident then that Abel's offering excelled that of Cain in two most important respects, namely: in the matter of it, and in the disposition with which it was offered: his offering being "a firstling of his flock," while Cain's was only "of the fruits of the ground;" and being offered with an express view to the sacrifice which was in due time to be offered, while Cain had no respect whatever to himself as needing salvation, or to the Savior by whom alone he could find acceptance with God.

***~~2. That God had respect to Abel's offering, and not to Cain's—~~***

In what way God testified his acceptance of Abel's offering we are not informed: we are sure however that it was in some way clearly understood by Abel; and as clearly by Cain also, since it was the means of filling him with envy and wrathful indignation. It is probable, that God sent fire from Heaven to consume the sacrifice of Abel. This in after ages was frequently done by God; as at the first offering of sacrifices by Aaron in the tabernacle [Leviticus 9:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 9.24), and at the first offering of sacrifices also in the temple of Solomon, 2 Chronicles 7:1. Whatever the testimony was, God showed, by it, that he accepted both the person and the offering of Abel, while neither the person nor the offering of Cain were at all acceptable in his sight, [Genesis 4:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 4.4-5).

Such being the acknowledged superiority of Abel's sacrifice, let us consider,

***~~II. What instruction the pre-eminent acceptance of it conveys to us—~~***

We are told that "by it, he being dead yet speaks." The whole record concerning it shows,

***~~1. That man, however righteous he may be, needs a sacrifice—~~***

Abel is characterized by our blessed Lord himself as eminently righteous; being designated by the name "righteous Abel, [Matthew 23:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 23.35)." And in our text it is said, that "God bore testimony to him as a righteous man." But did he on account of his distinguished piety not need an atonement? Or did he think himself entitled to approach his God in any other way than as a self-ruined sinner, that could be saved only through the blood of a vicarious sacrifice? No! It is remarkable that Cain, who was at heart a murderer, thought he might find acceptance with God without such a sacrifice; while "righteous Abel" dared not to hope for mercy in any other way than through the sacrifice of Christ. At this very hour none more deride the necessity of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and in his atoning blood, than those who are hostile in their hearts to all vital godliness!

But, however moral any may have been, they are sinners before God, and must seek for mercy solely through the blood and righteousness of Christ: for an Apostle expressly tells us, that "without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins! [Hebrews 9:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.22)."

Let this then be remembered by us all: for it is by no means so deeply considered as it ought: there lurks in all of us a self-righteous disposition. We, no less than the Jews of old, are averse to "submit to the righteousness of God," and make the Lord Jesus Christ "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense." But there is "no way to the Father but by him, [John 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.6)," nor "any name under Heaven but his whereby any man can be saved! [Acts 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.12)."

***~~2. That a sacrifice has been appointed of God for the sins of the world—~~***

It has been before shown, that Abel's "faith" necessarily presupposes a divine institution as the object of his faith. And what was the sacrifice that was ordained by God? Was it to the blood of bulls or goats that men were taught to look? "The blood of bulls and of goats," as the Apostle tells us, "could never take away sins." That same person who was foretold to Adam as "the Seed of the woman who would bruise the serpent's head," was to effect that victory by having his own heel first bruised, [Genesis 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.15), or, as Paul expresses it, he was "through death to destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, [Hebrews 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.14)." In a word, he was to "redeem us to God by his blood," and to be the atoning sacrifice not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the world. He it was who, both in Abel's sacrifice, and in all the sacrifices under the law, was shadowed forth; and who is therefore called "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world! [Revelation 13:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 13.8)." Before he came into the world, his sacrifice had a retrospective, as at the time of its being offered it had a prospective, efficacy for the salvation of all who trusted in it; so that, from the beginning to the end of time, he is the only Savior of sinful man!

***~~3. That through that sacrifice all who believe in it shall assuredly be saved—~~***

We are told that the record concerning Abraham's having his faith imputed to him for righteousness, "was not written for his sake alone, but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed if we believe on him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, [Romans 4:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.23-24)." And we may be perfectly sure, that the record concerning the efficacy of Abel's faith, and the testimony given to him from God respecting the acceptableness of his sacrifice, was not for his honor merely, but for our encouragement.

It shows to us how pleasing in God's sight the humble Publican is in comparison with the self-applauding Pharisee, especially when he rests all his hopes of mercy on the atoning blood of Christ. It shows us, that God "will fill the hungry with good things, while the rich he will send empty away." In a word, it shows us that:  
"the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse from all sin!"  
"whoever comes unto God by him shall never be cast out!"  
"all who believe in him shall be justified from all things!"

Thus, while it directs us to the blood of Christ as the ground of our hope, it assures us, that that "blood speaks not only as much and as satisfactorily as the blood of Abel did, but far better things than that ever did or could speak, [Hebrews 12:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.24)."

There is one thing not yet noticed in our text, which deserves particular attention, and which will serve us for an**APPLICATION of the subject to our souls—**

"By his faith," and the consequent acceptance of his sacrifice, "Abel, though dead—yet speaks to us."

Hear then Abel as now speaking to you from the dead!

'Brethren, though dead, I yet live; and though I have been dead almost six thousand years, I would speak to you as though I had died but yesterday. I am concerned that you would profit by my experience. You are all assembled to worship and serve your God: and you are ready to conceive that on that account you are all rendering unto God an acceptable service. But I must declare to you that this is far from being the case. Your outward forms, considered independently of the frame of mind in which you engage in them, are of no value in the sight of God. You may "kill an ox in sacrifice, and be only as if you slew a man—you may sacrifice a lamb, and be as if you cut off a dog's neck—you may offer an oblation, and be as if you offered swine's blood—you may burn incense, and be no more accepted, than if you blessed an idol! [Isaiah 66:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.3)."*God looks not at the act, but at the heart*: and if the heart is not right with him, your sacrifices, however costly they may be, are only "an abomination to him! [Proverbs 21:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 21.27)."

"Of all this you may be assured from what is related concerning my brother Cain and myself. He, as you have been told, was not accepted, while I was honored with tokens of God's merciful approbation. What was it that made the difference? Why did God look on *me*with delight—and with abhorrence on *him*? It was because I approached him as a sinner, whose hopes were founded solely on the sacrifice of his Son, while my brother approached him without any such exercise of repentance and faith.

"And so it is with you. On those who draw near to him with a broken and contrite spirit, and with their eyes fixed on the Lamb of God to take away their sins, he looks with delight: he will even give to them sweet tokens of his acceptance, and testimonies of his love: and, if he does not give the same visible demonstrations of his love to them, as he did to me, he will not leave them without witness even in the minds of their enemies: for he will so enrich their souls by his grace, as shall make it evident, that God is with them of a truth.

"But on the proud self-righteous formalist he will look with scorn and indignation. Yes, to those of you who have come up hither merely to perform a duty which custom has prescribed, he says, "You hypocrites, in vain do you worship me, seeing that, while you draw near to me with your mouths, and honor me with your lips, your hearts are far from me! [Matthew 15:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 15.7-9)." I warn you then not to deceive your own souls: for assuredly, whether you will believe it or not, God will before long make the same distinction between you that he did between me and Cain. The contrite and believing worshipers shall have a testimony of his approbation before the whole assembled universe; but the impenitent and unbelieving shall be marked out as *monuments of his everlasting displeasure*.

"As for you who worship him in faith, he may for the present leave you in the hands of the ungodly, who from envy may be incensed against you; he may even allow your "greatest enemies to be those of your own household;" yes, he may leave you even to be put to death, and to suffer martyrdom for your fidelity to him. But let not that deter you from confessing him openly before men. I have never regretted the sufferings I endured for him; nor will you ever regret anything which you may be called to sustain. Even the testimony which you shall now enjoy in your own conscience, shall be an ample recompense for all. What then shall that testimony in the day of judgment be, when he shall say, "Well done, good and faithful servants, enter into the joy of your Lord?"

"Go on then without fear, and "hold fast the profession of your faith without wavering." "Be faithful unto death; and he will give you a crown of life! [Revelation 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.10)." '

Such we may well conceive to be the strains in which Abel would now address you: and I pray God that they may sink down into our ears, and produce a saving effect upon our souls.

Are there any here who are "going in the way of Cain, Jude verse 11," and "hating those who are more righteous than themselves, [1 John 3:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.11-12)." Ah! think what misery attaches to such a state of mind, both in this world and the next. Even here, as God has said, "there is no peace to the wicked; but they are like the troubled sea, whose waters cast up mire and dirt, [Isaiah 57:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.20-21);" and what will they be hereafter?

What does *Cain*now think of that piety that he despised, and of that enmity with which he persecuted it even unto death? Now he knows who was right: and so will you before long, whether you will now learn it or not.

But O! Stop before it be too late: and have recourse to that sacrifice which will avail for all who trust in it. And you who are suffering for righteousness' sake, "marvel not as though some strange thing happened unto you, but rejoice, inasmuch as you are partakers of Abel's sufferings and of Christ's also, that, when his glory shall be revealed, you may be glad also with exceeding joy! 1 Peter 4:12-13."

***~~#2319~~***

***~~ENOCH TAKEN TO HEAVEN WITHOUT DYING~~***

***~~[Hebrews 11:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.5)~~***

"By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God."

Among those who obtained a good report through faith, Enoch bears a very distinguished place. He was a prophet, and bore testimony against the abominations which prevailed around him, with the utmost possible fidelity. His prophecy, indeed, is preserved to us, as it were, by miracle: for neither Moses, nor any other writer of the Old Testament, makes any mention of it; nor is it referred to by any of the evangelists, or in the Acts of the Apostles. But, Jude who wrote only one short epistle, records it, and thus throws light upon the "faith" which in my text is ascribed to Enoch: he shows that Enoch had a view of Christ as the Judge of living and dead, and of the judgment itself as passed in perfect accordance with the character and conduct of every individual of mankind, Jude verses 14, 15.

Enoch, though the seventh from Adam in descent, is here introduced immediately after Abel; in order to show, that, as in Abel the *operations of faith*were illustrated, so in Enoch might be seen the *reward of faith*. Indeed, the translation of Enoch took place very soon after the death of Adam; so that, while God's hatred of sin was manifested in the one, his love of holiness might be displayed in the other.

In considering the translation of Enoch, I shall notice it,

***~~I. As a testimony to him—~~***

***~~Enoch doubtless had received many tokens of God's approbation before—~~***

To Abel's offering God had borne witness, as being more acceptable to him than that of Cain, verse 4. And, no doubt, many testimonies of Divine approbation had been given to Enoch also. Did Enoch "walk with God Genesis? 5:22; [Genesis 5:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 5.24)." No doubt, God also walked with him "as a Friend, [James 2:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.23)," "manifesting himself to him as he did not unto the world, [John 14:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.21-23)," and "witnessing with his spirit that he was a child of God, [Romans 8:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.15-16)." Indeed, there is no one who "draws near to God, but God will also:  
draw near to him, [James 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.8),"  
"hold sweet fellowship with him, [1 John 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.3),"  
"lift up upon him the light of his countenance, [Psalm 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 4.6),"  
and "shed abroad his love in his heart, [Romans 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.5)."

***~~In his translation, such a testimony was borne to his character, as carried conviction with it to the minds of others also—~~***

A man, by inward tokens of God's approbation, "has the witness of it in himself, [1 John 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.10);" but here was an *expression*of it, which carried its own evidence along with it to all who were then living upon earth, and has from that moment stamped the character of Enoch as a most distinguished favorite of Heaven. No man was ever thus honored before; and only one other person even to the present hour.

By this translation to Heaven, the sentence of God against sin was reversed: for death was disarmed of its power over this holy man; and he was borne to Heaven, both in body and soul, without ever encountering the agonies or terrors of death.

We do not know the circumstances attendant on his removal, we know not; but, as in the case of Elijah, it must have been witnessed by someone of undoubted credibility; else the effect of it would have been lost: and, from its being said, that "he was not found," it is evident, that, as in Elijah's case also, a search was made for him, lest he would have been transported to some remote place only, instead of being borne, as they were taught to believe, into the very presence of his God, [2 Kings 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 2.10); [2 Kings 2:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 2.16-17). But the fact itself, whatever its circumstances were, is a standing proof to the whole world, that this holy man had so walked as to please his God.

But let us view this event,

***~~II. As an instruction to us—~~***

Two things it obviously teaches us:

***~~1. That there is a future state of existence, both for our souls and bodies—~~***

It is clear that the future judgment was known to Enoch; and therefore it is most probable that he was informed as to the resurrection of the body. But, at all events, his translation gave to those of his day, and to all future ages—an evidence that the body was capable of participating in all the glory and felicity of the soul. Of course, some change was made in him, even as there shall be in those who shall be living at the time of our Lord's advent to judge the world. At that time, all who are alive "will be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet: for this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality, [1 Corinthians 15:51-53](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.51-53)."

But it was essentially the same body, even as that of our blessed Lord was at the time of his ascension to Heaven, [Philippians 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.21); and, though our bodies shall be consumed by worms—yet shall they be raised again, and be the subjects either of eternal happiness or eternal misery, according as they were employed, either in the service of God, or in rebellion against him, [Daniel 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 12.2).

***~~2. That those who have pleased God in this world shall assuredly dwell with God in the world to come—~~***

The eminent piety of Enoch was well known. What, then, did his translation announce, whether to that or future generations? God said by it: 'Behold how I will act towards those who serve and honor me. I will not leave you to guess at it, as a matter above your comprehensions. You shall see it; you shall have it brought so manifestly before your eyes, that you shall have no doubt whatever respecting it.

Did Enoch believe in me?

Did Enoch serve me?

Did Enoch walk with me?

Did Enoch, in the whole of his life and conduct, strive to honor me?

In a word, did Enoch "please" me?

See then, in Enoch , the felicity that awaits you: for I have set him forth as a pattern to all future ages, and as a pledge, that "whoever honors me, shall be honored by me, [1 Samuel 2:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.30);" and that "to him who orders his conduct aright, I will show the salvation of God, [Psalm 50:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 50.23)." '

What now shall I add? What, but these two things?

***~~Learn—~~***

***~~1. What must be your aim in life—~~***

You have seen what it was in Enoch that pleased God. You have seen, that he really "believed" in God; and that his whole life was one continued walk with God. "He walked, not as pleasing men, but God, who tries the thoughts." So walk, and you shall please him too; yes, and shall have such tokens of his approbation, as shall richly recompense all that you may either do or suffer for him, though it were a thousand times more than was ever yet done or suffered by mortal man.

***~~2. What should be your comfort in death—~~***

What is death to a child of God? It is not death—no; it is a sleep, a "falling asleep in Jesus, [1 Thessalonians 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.14). [Acts 7:60](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.60)." This it is, as it respects the body; which shall surely "awake from the dust, [Isaiah 26:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.19)," and be re-united to the soul, [1 Thessalonians 4:15-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.15-18).

And what shall it be to the soul? A translation, such as Enoch's was. Could you but see what takes place at the departure of a real saint, you would see the angels waiting to catch his spirit at the instant of its departure from the body, and bearing it on their wings into the presence of its God. And is not this an object to be desired? Do you wonder that Paul "desired to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better, [Philippians 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.23)." than any state on earth can be! Regard you death, then, in this view: and learn to number it among your treasures, [1 Corinthians 3:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.21-22); and in the daily habit of your minds, "be looking for, and hastening unto, the coming of the day of Christ! [2 Peter 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.12)."

***~~#2320~~***

***~~THE NECESSITY OF FAITH~~***

***~~[Hebrews 11:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.6)~~***

"Without faith it is impossible to please God."

THIS whole chapter is one continued commendation of faith: which is marked, throughout, as *the one source of every good action, and as the certain prelude to everlasting felicity*. But, in what is spoken of Enoch, there seems, to a superficial observer, to be no connection with faith: for his translation was a mere act of God's favor: and, though it is said that "he pleased God," it may be supposed that it was by his works that he approved himself to God, and not by any actings of faith.

But, in my text, the Apostle proves that Enoch's *faith was the leading principle from which his works proceeded*, and the true object of God's peculiar approbation. His argument may be thus stated in a few words: "Without faith it is impossible to please God." But Enoch did please God: therefore it is clear that Enoch believed; and that *his works, whatever they were, were the fruits of faith*. Now, in confirmation of this momentous truth, I will show,

***~~I. What is that "faith, without which we cannot please God"—~~***

Let the Apostle himself be heard in the words following my text. Three things he points out, as the objects of true and saving faith. It has respect to GOD,

***~~1. A belief in God's eternal and immutable existence—~~***

The believer does not conceive of God as resembling the gods of the heathen, or as having a derived existence; but as existing necessarily from everlasting; and as immutable in every one of his perfections, "the same yesterday, today, and for ever."

***~~2. A belief in God as the Moral Governor of the universe—~~***

This is implied in the regard he manifests to those who seek him. For, if he were not observant of the ways of men, and if he did not inspect the most secret motions of their hearts, he could not "reward" men according to their works.

***~~3. A belief in God as fulfilling to us all his covenant engagements—~~***

This is very particularly intended in our text. For how could he "reward" men, if they were not first "accepted in his beloved Son?" Men are sinners; and, as sinners, they are condemned and utterly incapable of removing their guilt and condemnation by anything which they themselves can do. It is through the atonement which Christ has offered for them, that they obtain reconciliation with God; and through Christ alone can any work of theirs come up with acceptance before God.

The mediation of Christ was agreed upon between the Father and Son from all eternity; Christ engaging to "make his soul an offering for sin;" and the Father engaging, for his sake, to accept the person and services of all that would believe in him, [Isaiah 53:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.10).

This, therefore, is essential to saving faith: and, in order to "please God," we must unite these three things:  
a belief in God's eternal and immutable existence;  
a belief in God as the Moral Governor of the universe;  
a belief in God as fulfilling to us all his covenant engagements.

Now, "without such faith," we are told, "it is impossible to please God." Let me then proceed to show you,

***~~II. Why faith is so indispensable for that end—~~***

**1.** Without such faith, we cannot have any right dispositions towards God—  
  
How can we *love*to an unknown being?

Can we *fear*one who neither regards, nor will ever take cognizance of, our actions?

What can we feel of *gratitude*towards one to whom we can trace no obligations?

Can we *trust*in one of whose agency in the affairs of men we are altogether ignorant?

It is obvious, that, so far as respects pious feelings, we are no better than "Atheists in the world, [Ephesians 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.12)." How, then, can God be "pleased" with such wretches as these?

***~~2. Without such faith we cannot render unto God any acceptable service—~~***

Any service, in order to be accepted of God, must be such as he himself has required: it must have respect to his authority, as commanding it; to his word, as the rule to which it is to be conformed; and to his glory, as the end for which it is to be done. But, if we do not possess faith in God, then:

How can we have respect to his authority?

How can we conform to his word?

How can we desire to advance his glory?

Any pretense of this kind must be downright hypocrisy or delusion: and, whatever the service is, it can be no better, in God's estimation, than "the cutting off a dog's neck for sacrifice, and the offering of swine's blood! [Isaiah 66:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.3)."

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

Inquire, then, I beg you,

***~~1. Into the nature and reality of your faith—~~***

Men, if they inquire into their state at all, are apt to confine their attention to their *works*. But here we see how necessary it is to inquire into our *faith*; since, if our faith is not sound and scriptural, nothing else can be right before God.

Inquire, whether you have any deep conviction even of the existence of God; and still more, of his moral government, and of his inspecting everything in order to judge the world in righteousness at the last day.

Inquire still further, what views you have of God, as covenanting with his Son to expiate our guilt, to renovate our souls, and to present our services to him perfumed with the incense of his own merits, and rendered acceptable through his prevailing intercession.

Indeed, my brethren, these should be subjects of our most anxious inquiry from day to day. Paul says, "Examine yourselves, whether you be in the faith, 2 Corinthians 13:5." And I also would say the same: for, if "without a true faith it is impossible to please God," you cannot but feel the indispensable importance of having this matter clearly ascertained, and distinctly determined.

***~~2. Into the fruits and effects of your faith—~~***

It is here taken for granted, that the believer "comes to God," and it is certain that true faith will bring us to God, in deeply penitential sorrow, and in earnest cries for mercy. If we really believe in God, we shall "diligently seek him" in the use of all his appointed ordinances, and in the name of his only dear Son. Yes, and we shall have our expectations of mercy greatly enlarged. We shall delight to view God, not merely as a Sovereign, but as "a Rewarder," who is at all times waiting for opportunities to express the utmost possible love towards his obedient people.

Say now, brethren, whether such be your views, your contemplations, your joys?*Of what value is your faith, if it is not productive of these fruits?*If it does not operate in this way, it is no better than the faith of devils! [James 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.19).

"But, beloved, we are persuaded of better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak, [Hebrews 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.9)." "But we desire that every one of you" make these things a subject of most earnest inquiry; so that, after a diligent and candid examination, you may discern your real state before God; and may be brought "to a full assurance of hope" that you are really "pleasing God" in this world, and shall be "rewarded by him" in the world to come! [Hebrews 6:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.11).

***~~#2321~~***

***~~NOAH'S FAITH~~***

***~~[Hebrews 11:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.7)~~***

"By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith."

OF all the principles which operate in the Christian's mind, faith is the most distinguished. In some respects indeed love claims a preference, because it is the very image of the Deity, [1 John 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.8), and will exist when faith and hope shall be no more [1 Corinthians 13:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.13). But *as faith is that grace which most of all honors God, so it is that which God most delights to honor*. On many occasions wherein a bright assemblage of graces shone forth, our blessed Lord overlooked all others, and commended faith, [Matthew 8:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 8.10); [Matthew 15:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 15.28). [Mark 10:52](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 10.52). [Luke 7:50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.50). *The chapter before us recounts the exercises of faith in the most eminent saints from the beginning of the world to the days of the Apostles*. We shall call your attention at present to the faith of Noah; and,

***~~I. Illustrate Noah's faith—~~***

The different things here spoken respecting it require us to notice:

***~~1. Its operations—~~***

He believed the "Divine warning".

God had declared to him his intention to destroy the world by a deluge. And how did he receive the warning? Did he indulge vain reasonings about the practicability of such an event; or pretend to be more merciful than God? No. Though there was not the remotest appearance of such a thing, he believed it would certainly take place: and though to proud reason it seemed hard that all living creatures, old and young, men and beasts, would be involved in one undiscriminating ruin—yet he doubted not but that it would be as God had said; and was persuaded that "the Judge of all the earth would do right."

***~~He was "moved with fear" on account of it.~~***

He had nothing to fear respecting his eternal state, because he was a perfect and upright man, and walked in holy fellowship with his God. But God was incensed by the wickedness of his creatures, insomuch that "he regretted he had made them:" and he determined to pour out his fury upon them to the uttermost.

Did it not then befit Noah, as well as others, to fear and tremble? Did it befit him to be so absorbed in selfishness as to be unconcerned about the destruction, the sudden, and perhaps everlasting, destruction, of all the human race? Indeed a dread of the Divine judgments was necessary to stir him up to use the proper means for his own safety: and it was an unequivocal proof of his crediting the declarations of God concerning them.

He exerted himself in God's appointed way.

God commanded him to construct a vessel of an immense size, and such as had not been seen from the foundation of the world It was above one hundred and sixty yards long, twenty-seven broad, and sixteen high. The expense of building it must be exceeding great, so as to swallow up all his fortune. The time it would occupy would be many years; during all of which the people would be scoffing at him as a deluded visionary, and taking occasion from the very forbearance of God to load him with grosser insults, [2 Peter 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.4). But he regarded not any labor, any odium, any sacrifice in the path of duty: he was intent only on executing the Divine mandate, and on providing for the security of those who would believe his testimony.

***~~2. Its effects and consequences—~~***

He "condemned the world".

During the hundred and twenty years that he was engaged in building the ark, he preached to the world with much earnestness and fidelity: and therefore doubtless condemned them often in his discourses. But he condemned them yet more by his example.

His faith condemned their unbelief;  
his fear condemned their security;  
his obedience condemned their disobedience.

If he had not spoken one word with his lips, his constructing the ark would have been a tacit, but keen, and continual reproof to all around him.

He "saved his family".

At the appointed time the flood came. The world, notwithstanding all the warnings given to them, were as far as ever from expecting the event, [Matthew 24:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.38-39). It is probable that their contempt of Noah's superstition and folly (as they would have called it) had risen to its height, when they saw this immense vessel built, and filled with all different kinds of animals, and provisioned for many months; and Noah with his little family enclosed in it, before the smallest sign of any inundation had appeared. But in the midst of their revels the flood came and swept them all away! Only Noah, with his family, were preserved. That his family owed their preservation to him is clear; not only because it was ascribed to the exercise of his faith, but because one at least of them was as deserving of God's wrath as the generality of those who perished.

He "became an heir of righteousness".

Noah knew that the whole of that mysterious dispensation was typical of the salvation which is given us in Christ Jesus, [1 Peter 3:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.20-21). He saw that a more terrible deluge was about to overwhelm an ungodly world: and that Christ was the ark which God had prepared for us. Into that ark he entered by faith: and thus, being "found in him, [Philippians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.9)," and "preserved in him, Jude verse 1," he "became an heir of the righteousness which is by faith;" or, in other words, he was accepted, justified, and saved through the Savior's merits.

While we call you to admire the faith of Noah, we would also,

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

Our circumstances being wholly different from his, there must be many particulars in his faith which we cannot imitate, but the substantial parts of it are imitable by all.

***~~1. Believe God's testimony respecting the judgments which he will bring upon the world—~~***

There are great and terrible judgments denounced against the ungodly, yes, "against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, [Psalm 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 9.17); [Psalm 11:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 11.6) and [Romans 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.18)." Nor shall gross wickedness alone, be the object of God's wrath: a state of unregeneracy, whether attended with more or less open sin, will certainly involve us in the general doom! [John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.3). Nor shall one of all the human race escape, unless he gets into the ark prepared for him, [Acts 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.12).

Now do not presume to dispute against this. Do not, because there is no appearance at present of such calamities, imagine that they shall never come. Do not pretend to be more merciful than God, and to say: God will never execute such tremendous judgments: for "he has said, and he will do it; he has spoken, and he will make it good." It may appear as improbable as the deluge; but, however improbable it may appear, it shall come to pass; and all who will not *believe*it now, shall *experience*the truth of it to their cost.

***~~2. Use the means of safety which God has appointed—~~***

You have not to build an ark: there is one constructed and provisioned by God himself; and the door is open for you to enter in. Do not absurdly ask, "How can that vessel save me?" Neither attempt to form another for yourself: nor flee to this or that mountain for safety. But go to Christ: seek a saving interest in him by faith: commit yourself wholly and cheerfully to him: and then you may defy all the storms and billows that menace your destruction.

Moreover, delay not to place yourself beyond the reach of danger; because, while you are loitering, "the door may be shut!" and all entrance into it may be barred forever! [Matthew 25:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.10-12).

It is not at all improbable that many who had derided Noah, or perhaps assisted in constructing the ark, clung to it when the floods came; and cried to Noah, "Open to us, and take us in!" And doubtless, if that were the case, Noah would pity their deplorable condition when he heard their cries or saw their unavailing endeavors. But *God*had shut the door; and Noah was not at liberty to open it: so that, one after another, they all "sank like lead in the mighty waters." Thus many in the last day will say, "Lord, Lord, open to us!" Or "they will cry to the rocks to fall upon them, and the hills to cover them from the wrath of the Lamb, [Revelation 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 6.16);" but the judgments they once despised, will come upon them irresistibly, and for ever. Cultivate then a holy fear; and enter into the ark while it continues open to you!

***~~3. Allow nothing to divert you from your purpose—~~***

We have said that Noah incurred much odium as well as much expense in this exercise of faith. And it is certain, that you also will be called to make some sacrifices for your God. Not your reputation only, but your worldly interests also, may be materially affected by your obedience to Christ. But what did Noah lose in the outcome? What concern did he feel either about the harsh reflections cast on him, or the labor and money he had bestowed—when he found himself safe in the ark, and saw the whole world perishing in the waters?

Still less will you feel, when you shall see the floods of divine vengeance deluging the ungodly, and yourselves, as "heirs of righteousness," placed beyond the reach of harm. Fear not then to be singular in a good cause. *It is better to condemn the world by a holy singularity, and to be condemned by them on account of it; than to be condemned with them, and endure the wrath of an incensed God.*

***~~#2322~~***

***~~ABRAHAM'S LIFE A PATTERN FOR OURS~~***

***~~[Hebrews 11:8-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.8-11)~~***

"By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith Abraham, even though he was past age--and Sarah herself was barren--was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise."

THERE can scarcely be proposed to our consideration any subject more important than *the practical efficacy of faith*. It is the one subject which pervades this whole chapter: and it is set before us in the most advantageous way that can be imagined, being exhibited in living examples, in whom it was so embodied as to be visible, as it were, before our eyes. Had the Apostle launched forth into a general description of it, we might possibly be thought to lay an undue stress on any expressions which he has used: but, when he merely refers us to historic facts as illustrative of the point, we feel, that there is no room for misapprehension on the part of any candid inquirer.

The Apostle has already adduced instances which occurred before the flood: and now he comes to specify others which took place at different and distant periods, almost to the apostolic age. At the head of these is the case of Abraham, who, both in this chapter, and in other parts of Scripture, is more celebrated for his faith than any other of the children of men. We propose to consider,

***~~I. His conduct under the influence of faith—~~***

It is but a partial view that we shall be led to take at present of Abraham's faith, because other, and yet more remarkable, circumstances will come under our consideration at a future time. We now notice only two things:

***~~1. His departure from his own country—~~***

While Abraham was in Ur of the Chaldees, God appeared to him, and said, "Get out of your country, and from your kindred, and from your father's house, unto a land which I will show you, [Genesis 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 12.1) and [Acts 7:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.3)." Whether this was done in a vision, or by a voice, we are not informed: but it is clear that it was done in such a way as not to leave the smallest doubt upon Abraham's mind, that the command proceeded from Jehovah, the only true and living God. It was a command which required much self-denial: for every man naturally feels attached to his country, and his kindred, and his possessions; and, unless induced by the prospect of some great advantages, is averse to leave them. But *the self-denial was the greater, because he was not informed where he was to go:*it was to a land which would afterwards be shown him. What would all his friends and relatives think of him, when he told them that he was about to forsake them all, and did not so much as know where he was going? Would they not account him mad? Yet he did obey, without hesitation, and without a murmur.

God, at the same time that he issued this command, had engaged to "make of him a great nation," and to raise up from his loins the promised "Seed, in whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed, [Genesis 12:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 12.2-3);" and of God's power or faithfulness he had no doubt, [Romans 4:18-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.18-21). He therefore went forth, willingly renouncing all present comforts in obedience to his God, assured that, however despised or ridiculed his conduct might be, it would prove in the outcome to be the path of happiness and wisdom.

***~~2. His sojourning in the land of promise as in a strange country—~~***

When he went forth from his own country, he took with him Sarah his wife, and Terah his father, and his nephew Lot. But though he went towards Canaan, he stopped short of it in Haran; and there abode five years, until his father's death: when he proceeded to Canaan, [Acts 7:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.4), where, except when driven from it by a famine, he abode during the remainder of his days. But did he then merely change one inheritance for another? No; he had not there the smallest inheritance, "no, not so much as to set his foot on." He had not even a stationary abode; but dwelt in tents, which were moved from one place to another, as occasion required. Thus avowing himself to be a mere pilgrim and sojourner there, and to be "looking for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

The city which he had left in his native land, and those which were in the land of promise, had their foundation in the dust, to which they would all in time be reduced. But the heavenly city, which God had formed for his own habitation and the eternal residence of his saints, would continue forever: and to that he looked as his home; content to have no abiding place here, if only he might attain to that as his eternal rest, [Hebrews 13:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.14).

Nor was it for himself only that he chose this unsettled mode of life, but for his children also, even for "Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise:" for what he desired for himself, he desired for them also—the enjoyment of the Divine favor, and the possession of an unseen, but everlasting inheritance.

But while we contemplate his conduct in these respects, it will be proper to show,

***~~II. How far his example is a pattern for us—~~***

It is evident that *the whole catalogue of saints here enumerated is intended to illustrate the nature and efficacy of faith*. Yet in considering the conduct of the individuals, we must make due allowance for the difference of circumstances, and rather mark the principle by which they were actuated, than the particular acts in which it was displayed. If, for instance, we would imagine that we were called to forsake our country and kindred in the way that Abraham did, we would greatly err. But I conceive, that, in the two following respects, all will confess we are bound to follow him:

***~~1. The authority of God would in our minds be paramount to every other authority—~~***

As he "consulted not with flesh and blood," when once the Divine will was intimated to him, so neither should we. It should be sufficient for us that God has commanded anything. There should then be no inquiry whether the command be easy or not; nor should there be any regard to consequences in obeying it: there should be in us a fixed determination of heart to fulfill his will at all events.

If, for instance, the Lord Jesus Christ says to us, "If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me;" we must not stand to inquire into the extent of the self-denial that may be requisite, or the weight of the cross which we may have to bear—but leave that to his wise and gracious disposal, being intent on nothing but the performance of our duty to him. If he adds that we must "forsake all, and follow him," not only not loving, but actually hating, in comparison with him, our own nearest and most honored relatives—yes, and "our own lives also," we must not reply, "This is a hard saying; who can hear it?" but must set ourselves instantly to fulfill in all its extent whatever he has required of us. If men, who know not God, despise, and revile, and persecute us, we must be ready to welcome it all for his sake; and to reply to the menaces of the most ferocious adversaries, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge you." In a word, *we must spare no pains to ascertain the mind of God; and, that once learned, neither men nor devils should deter us from laboring to fulfill it.*

***~~2. The interests of the eternal world should be paramount to every other interest—~~***

Abraham had never seen the heavenly city; but, in the hope of reaching it, he counted all earthly possessions, interests, or pleasures, as unworthy of notice. We too are ignorant of what awaits us in the eternal world: we have no conception of the glory that shall be revealed to us at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. But by faith we may even now get such views of it, that all earthly glory shall vanish before it, as the stars before the meridian sun.

How empty did all the glory of Egypt appear to Moses, when he had respect unto the recompense of reward which awaited him in the eternal world, verse 26. And to Paul all his accumulated afflictions appeared lightness itself, while he looked, not at "the things which are visible and temporal, but at those which are invisible and eternal! [2 Corinthians 4:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.17-18)." And thus it will be with us: it will be a small thing to us that we have no inheritance here, or even that we are called to give up an inheritance we already possess. We shall even "take joyfully the confiscation of our goods, knowing that we have in Heaven a better, and an enduring, substance [Hebrews 10:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.34)." We shall contentedly live as pilgrims and sojourners here, and seek our rest only in the world above.

***~~Let us then take occasion from this subject to inquire,~~***

***~~1. Whether we are truly children of Abraham—~~***

Our blessed Lord has told us, that, "If we are Abraham's children, we shall do the works of Abraham, [John 8:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.39)." Do we then these works? Do we in these respects "walk in the steps of Abraham? [Romans 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.12)." Inquire what authority has God's Word with you? Do you set yourselves to obey every command of his as soon as you know it? Are you anxious to know his will in order that you may obey it? Inquire also, what influence the world has over you? If you belong to Christ, though you are in the world, you are not of it: "you are not of the world, even as Christ was not of the world, [John 17:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.14-16);" you love it not, nor anything that is in it: "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, are shunned by you as ensnaring, and despised by you as unsatisfying, 1 [John 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.15-16)." "The very friendship of it you avoid, as enmity with God, [James 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.4);" you "come out from it, [2 Corinthians 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.17);" and will "not be conformed to it, [Romans 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.2);" you are even "crucified unto it, and esteem it as a crucified" object in your eyes, [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.14).

Say, is it thus with you? and do you regard it thus in reference to your children, as well as unto yourself; contented that your children after you would live in tents, if only they may attain an everlasting inheritance? The description of all true Christians is, "They walk by faith, and not by sight! 2 Corinthians 5:7." And surely it is no difficult thing to ascertain what your habits are in this respect. Oh! remember, that *if you are not Abraham's sons, you have another father, even the devil!*This may sound harsh; but it is the declaration of Him who "spoke as never any man spoke, [John 8:38-44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.38-44)." I beg you, leave not such an interesting subject any longer in suspense: nor rest until you have given evidence that you are "Abraham's seed," by walking as Abraham "walked, and as Christ himself also walked [1 John 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.6)."

***~~2. How you may become Abraham spiritual children—~~***

It was by faith that Abraham was brought into a justified state: and by faith are we also to be made partakers of that happiness. By our works we must prove our relation to him; but by faith alone, can we obtain an admission into his family. We must believe in the promised Seed, as he did; and then shall we be Christ's, as he was: "And, if we are Christ's, then are we Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise, [Galatians 3:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.6-7); [Galatians 3:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.29)."

Now it is of the utmost importance that we understand this matter well. For there are many who imagine, that to sequester themselves from the world is meritorious, and to live as monks or hermits is to secure the favor of their God. But this is a fatal error. There is no acceptance with God but by Jesus Christ, even by faith in his atoning blood. The Apostle especially guards us on this head. Abraham was circumcised: yet his righteousness came not by circumcision, but by the faith which he had while he was yet uncircumcised, [Romans 4:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.9-11). So it is not by any obedience of ours that we are to purchase an inheritance in Heaven; we must receive it as the free gift of God through Christ Jesus; and then press forward towards it in the way of his commandments. Let us walk with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in this world, and then we shall "sit down with them for ever in the kingdom of our God!"

***~~#2323~~***

***~~THE PRACTICAL EFFICACY OF FAITH~~***

***~~[Hebrews 11:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.13)~~***

"All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth."

THE *precepts*contained in Scripture may be supposed to admit of a latitude of interpretation favorable to the views of those who profess to regard them; but the *examples*that are recorded there, exhibit a light which the ingenuity of man in vain attempts to obscure. Who that reads the history of the patriarchs, and the commendations bestowed upon them, can doubt *the efficacy of faith to produce obedience*, or the nature of that obedience that ought to be produced? After all the allowance that must of necessity be made for a diversity of situation between them and us, the principle by which they were actuated remains the same, and its operation also must be the same, as far as the circumstances in which we are, agree with theirs. It is manifest that the catalogue which is here given us of holy men, was not recorded merely for the sake of historical information, but *for our instruction in righteousness, and as an incentive to imitate their virtues*. The passage before us relates to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who alone "had opportunity to return to the country which they had left:" confining therefore our attention to them, we shall show,

***~~I. Wherein they excelled—~~***

From the account given of them in the text, we are led to admire,

***~~1. The strength of their faith—~~***

They were taught to expect a numerous *seed*, and the possession of the land of Canaan: and, together with these temporal *blessings*; others of a far sublimer nature were promised; namely, a descendant in whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed; and an everlasting inheritance in Heaven. These promises they did not see accomplished: yes, not even the temporal blessings did they receive: for in the space of two hundred and forty years their posterity in the promised line amounted to but seventy; and Jacob, after sojourning as a stranger in Canaan, died in Egypt. But the patriarchs "walked by faith, and not by sight;" and, notwithstanding all their discouragements and delays, held fast their confidence even unto death: "they all died in faith."

***~~2. Faith's practical effects—~~***

Expecting higher blessings than this world could afford, they disregarded the things of time and sense as of little value. They considered themselves as mere "pilgrims and sojourners on the earth," and repeatedly "confessed" this to be their true and proper character, [Genesis 23:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 23.4); [Genesis 47:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 47.9). *This correspondence between their principles and their practice marked both the sincerity and efficacy of their faith*, and was, in fact, their highest commendation.

It will be easily seen from hence,

***~~II. Wherein they should be imitated—~~***

We are certainly not required to resemble them in their wandering unsettled kind of life; but we should imitate them:

***~~1. In the state of their minds—~~***

We have promises, as they also had; and promises which yet remain to be fulfilled to us. God has not only assured us of acceptance with him in and through his beloved Son, but has engaged to send his Holy Spirit into our hearts, for the carrying on and perfecting his work within us. We meet with many delays and difficulties, which at times disquiet our minds, and lead us almost to doubt the truth of the promises themselves: but we would "against hope believe in hope:" yes, we would "hold fast the rejoicing of our hope firm unto the end." If God be true to his word, and able to perform it, "not one jot or tittle of it can ever fail." Convinced of this, we would say, "Though he slays me—yet will I trust in him."

***~~2. In the habit of their lives—~~***

The name "pilgrims and strangers" was not given to the patriarchs merely on account of their sojourning in a strange land; for David, after he was established on his throne, and had subdued all his enemies on every side, assumes the same title, [1 Chronicles 29:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 29.15); and the same appellation is given to us also under the Christian dispensation, [1 Peter 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.11). Though we are not called to dwell in moveable habitations, we, as much as the patriarchs themselves, should answer to the character of pilgrims. We should feel only indifference to the things of this world. We should be daily advancing towards the heavenly world. And we should look forward to death as the consummation of all our happiness.

***~~#2324~~***

***~~THE CHRISTIAN'S DESIRE~~***

***~~[Hebrews 11:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.16)~~***

"Instead, they were *longing for*a better country--a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them."

WHEREVER the Gospel is faithfully declared, it is generally known that we are to be saved by "the same faith as that which dwelt in our father Abraham:" but it is not so generally understood, that we are to "walk in the steps of Abraham;" and that, in the most self-denying acts of his life, he was intended to be an example to us, [Romans 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.12). But in its *fruits*, as well as in its *object*, our faith must resemble his.

Now, among his most eminent virtues we must reckon his superiority to the world, in that he willingly left his own country to "sojourn in the land of promise, as in a strange land;" and continued, with Isaac and Jacob, to the very end of his days, to walk as a pilgrim and a sojourner there, in the assured hope and expectation of a better country, which he had in view, [Hebrews 11:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.8-10).

Both he and his family "had opportunities in abundance to return" to their own land, if they had been so disposed: but they knew themselves to be under the Divine guidance and direction; and regarded nothing in comparison with God's favor, and the ultimate possession of that recompense to which they had respect.

In them, then, we may see,

***~~I. The character of every true Christian—~~***

***~~The true Christian seeks a better portion than this world can give him—~~***

He is in the world, and performs the duties of his station, like others; and, as to external appearance, he differs not materially from the sober part of mankind. He does not make an unnecessary parade of his religion; nor does he affect needless singularities: but he moves quietly and unostentatiously in the sphere which God has assigned to him. But, in "the spirit of his mind," he is widely different from every unconverted man. "His affections are set on things above, and not on things below, [Colossians 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.2)." He sees the *emptiness*and *vanity*of all earthly things: he has weighed them in a balance, and found them lacking in every respect. He has seen how *uncertain*they are, both in the acquisition and enjoyment; how wholly *unsatisfying*to a spiritual mind; and how soon they pass away.

Heavenly things, on the contrary, he has found to be every way worthy of his pursuit: and he has determined, through grace, to disregard everything in comparison with them. He has learned to regard this world as a mere wilderness; a land through which he is passing to his own native country—the country where his Father dwells, and which is the place of his ultimate abode.

The conduct of the *patriarchs*gives, in this respect, a just idea of the Christian. They dwelt in tents, and not, like those around them, in cities: and thus they showed to all, and indeed avowed confessed, verse 13, that they were traveling towards a better land.

Thus the Christian takes not up his rest in anything here below; but shows, by the whole of his spirit and conduct, that he is indeed looking for "a better country, that is, a heavenly one."

***~~In this he is distinguished from all other persons whatever—~~***

Others may be weary of the world through disappointment and vexation; or they may feel an indifference towards some things that are in it. But there is no man, except the Christian, that is uniformly and universally dead to the world, at the same time that he has every opportunity to enjoy it.

No person, but the true Christian, compares the two worlds together, so as to give a deliberate and determined preference to that which is above. The glories of the eternal world are seen by none but him, and therefore are coveted by him alone. Others, in their judgment indeed, will acknowledge the superior excellence of the eternal world: (in truth, there is no man so stupid and brutish as to entertain a doubt of it,) but in their hearts they do not love it; and in their lives they do not seek it.

The true Christian, on the contrary, does seek it above all. And in this there is no difference to be found between saints of any country, or any age. The mind of the Patriarchs is the mind of every Christian under Heaven. The same sentiment prevails among the old and the young, the rich and the poor, the learned and the unlearned, the healthy and the dying. There may be a difference in many points both of faith and practice: but in this there is none. Every individual that is truly converted to God will say, "Hear my prayer, O LORD, listen to my cry for help; be not deaf to my weeping. For I dwell with you as a sojourner, a stranger, as all my fathers were, [Psalm 39:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 39.12)."

If the Christian is exalted in his character above others, so also is he in,

***~~II. The high honor conferred upon him—~~***

God is, by way of eminence, his God—

Jehovah is the God of all the universe: there is not a creature in Heaven, earth, or Hell, that is not subject to his control. But he is in a peculiar manner the God of those who consecrate themselves to him, and endeavor to walk according to his will. This is particularly declared in reference to the point before us; a separation, in mind and spirit, from the unbelieving world. "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty, [2 Corinthians 6:14-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.14-18)."

See what God was to Abraham, how he:  
conversed with him as a friend;  
admitted him to the closest fellowship;  
heard and answered his prayers;  
protected him from every enemy;  
and finally admitted him to his beatific presence in Heaven.

Thus will he do to all, who, like Abraham, endeavor to maintain a constant fellowship with him. Yes, whatever God himself possesses, even all his own infinite perfections, shall be employed in behalf of the believing soul, as much as if there were not another creature in the universe to engage his attention.

Thus will he do, I say, in this life: and, in the life to come, "he has prepared for the heavenly-minded Christian a city," a fixed habitation, a habitation suited to him, and worthy of God himself.

***~~Nor will God be ashamed to avow himself his God—~~***

God would be utterly ashamed to acknowledge a worldling as standing in such a relation to him; just as we would to acknowledge as our friend and favorite a notorious robber, or an abandoned prostitute. The worldling "robs God" in ten thousand respects. He robs him of his heart, his time, his service, [Malachi 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.8); and commits whoredom and adultery, as the Scripture expresses it, with every base thing which solicits his regards, [James 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.4). How is it possible that God would approve of such base proceedings, or profess himself the friend of such worthless creatures?

Our Lord tells us that "of those who are ashamed of him, he will be ashamed, when he shall come in the glory of his Father with his holy angels [Mark 8:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 8.38)." He will turn from them with indignation, saying, "Depart from me; I never knew you."

But of a faithful servant, neither God the Father, nor the Lord Jesus Christ, will ever be ashamed. On the contrary, "both the Father and the Son will come to him, and make their abode with him [John 14:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.23)." Indeed, God rather loves to be called his God, and chooses to be designated by that very name.

When Moses asked of God, by what name he would make him known to the children of Israel, God replied, "Thus shall you say unto the children of Israel; the Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me unto you. This is my name for ever; and this is my memorial unto all generations, [Exodus 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 3.15)." Individual believers indeed are not, nor can be, mentioned in Scripture, as these patriarchs are: but it is as true of one as of another: and God will put no difference between one and another, any further than the fidelity of each individual shall justify a distinction in his behalf.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who set their hearts on earthly things—~~***

How unlike are you to the saints of former days! Compare your life, or rather your spirit, with that of the persons mentioned in my text. Do not mistake, as though their call was peculiar, and nothing resembling it is given to you. I know you are not called to go out from your country, and to dwell in tents: but you are called to "desire a better country," and that supremely; yes, and not only to desire it, but to seek it; to seek it with your whole hearts. And is there not just occasion for you to seek it? Compare the present with the future world: can you doubt which would have the preference in your esteem? You cannot. Why, then, do you not act agreeably to your convictions? Do you not know, that *you can never have any hope of Heaven if you do not desire it—you can never possess it, if you do not labor for it?*I must further say, that, if you will not be the Lord's people, you can have, no hope that he will give himself to you as your God. You are afraid, perhaps, that your names will be cast out as evil if you renounce the world, and live in it as pilgrims and sojourners. To be ridiculed as righteous overmuch is, in your eyes, too formidable an evil to be encountered. But, if you are ashamed to be called God's servants, will not he be ashamed to be called your God? No doubt he will: and I wish you to consider this, before it be too late. Without a surrender of yourselves to him, you can never hope that he will give himself to you.

***~~2. Those who are endued with patriarchal virtue—~~***

There are some, I trust, who, like the patriarchs, desire, and show too by their lives that they do "desire a heavenly country." Go on, beloved, in your heavenly way; and whatever opportunities are afforded you to go back, regard them not: yes, if even the fiercest opposition be made to you, let it not impede your course one moment. What if people despise, and hate, and persecute you—shall that be allowed to divert you from your purpose? Do you not remember what is said of our Lord, that "for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross and despised the shame, and is set down on the right hand of the throne of God, [Hebrews 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.2)." Then, walk in his steps; and, like him, in due time you shall "inherit the glory prepared for you from the foundation of the world!"

***~~#2325~~***

***~~ABRAHAM OFFERING UP ISAAC~~***

***~~[Hebrews 11:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.17-19)~~***

"By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death."

THE whole life of the patriarchs was an apt illustration of the life of faith; because, when they had abundant opportunities of returning to the country from whence they had come out, they refused to do so, and preferred living as strangers and pilgrims in a foreign land, testifying plainly to all around them, that they regarded not this world as their home, but were in pursuit of a better, that is, a heavenly country, verse 13-16. The Apostle, having shown us this, returns to the case of Abraham, of whose faith he had already spoken in terms of high commendation, but whose principal act of faith remained yet to be noticed, as being the most illustrious exercise of that grace which the world had ever seen. This we are now to consider: and it will indeed be found profitable to mark,

***~~I. The wonderful transaction here recorded—~~***

***~~God issued a command to Abraham to offer up his son—~~***

This was such a command as was sufficient to confound his reason, and to excite in his mind a doubt whether it could proceed from a God of truth and love. The account is given us in the 22nd chapter of Genesis, where all the circumstances that attended it are recorded. Abraham had a son given to him in his old age, when neither he nor his wife, according to the common course of nature, could hope for any progeny. This son was constituted the appointed medium for bringing into the world "the Seed, in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed." Yet this son was Abraham to take, and with his own hands to offer him up a burned-offering to the Lord.

Upon the delivery of this command, we might suppose him almost of necessity to say: "Can this proceed from God? Can he not only take away thus the life of an innocent youth, but require me, the father of that youth, to be his executioner? Surely the suggestion comes rather from Satan, who seeing that this youth is to be the progenitor of the Messiah, the Redeemer of the world, would take advantage of my desire to please God, and make me his instrument to defeat the purposes of the Almighty, by destroying the very person to whom the promises are made." But he had no doubt whence the voice proceeded; and therefore

***~~This command he instantly set himself to fulfill—~~***

He "conferred not with flesh and blood:" he listened not to the dictates of carnal reason, nor consulted for a moment the judgment of his wife; but addressed himself to his arduous duty with readiness, with perseverance, and with a fortitude that was invincible. "He rose up early in the morning, and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and cleave the wood for the burned-offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him, [Genesis 22:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 22.3)."

But so distant was the appointed place, that he reached it not until the third day. What a time was here for meditation and reflection! and what conflicts may we suppose him to have experienced in his soul between parental love and duty to his God! Yet he persevered: yes, when the beloved youth, seeing in his father's hands the knife that was to slay the sacrifice, and the fire that was to consume it, put to him the touching question, "My father, behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burned-offering?" still he maintained his resolution; and, waving any direct answer to it, proceeded to the place.

There, no doubt, he revealed the matter to his son, who acquiesced in the Divine appointment; and then, having laid the wood in order, and bound his son, raised the knife to inflict the fatal wound. With what more than human firmness must he have been endowed, to execute an act so revolting to all the feelings of his nature, and so likely to transmit his name with infamy to the remotest posterity!*How was it that he acquired strength to perform the act?*We are told,

***~~In the execution of it he was animated and upheld by faith—~~***

To this principle his obedience is expressly ascribed: "By faith he offered Isaac." Mere reason would suggest to him, that, in destroying his son, he would annihilate the hopes of the whole world, founded as they were on the progeny that would hereafter spring from his loins. But by faith he was so persuaded both of the truth of God in his promises, and of his power to accomplish them, that he hesitated not to obey the Divine mandate; assured that, though his son were slain and burned to ashes, God would rather raise him up to life again than allow one jot or tittle of his word to fail.

What though no instance of such an interposition had ever yet existed? that was no reason that it would not exist, if it were necessary to the performance of the Divine promises. Indeed an interposition little short of that, had already existed in the very birth of Isaac, who had been given to him, when neither he nor Sarah could, according to nature, have any hope of an offspring: and as Omnipotence had given that son in accomplishment of a promise, so the same Almighty Power both could, and should, restore him even from the dead.

Nor was he in this respect disappointed of his hope: for, in the moment his hand was lifted up to slay his son, God arrested his arm, and forbade the execution of his purpose, accepting the will for the deed, and accounting that as actually done which in an instant of time would have been irrevocably done, if the same authority that enjoined it had not interposed to prevent it: so that Abraham is always spoken of as having actually offered up his son; and as having, "in a figure, received him again from the dead."

Now, as in this transaction there are several different points to be attended to, so will there be a corresponding diversity in,

***~~II. The instruction to be derived from it—~~***

We may learn,

***~~1. From his trial, the use and intent of trials—~~***

God is said to have "tested Abraham." But we are not to understand from this that he did anything with a view to lead Abraham to the commission of evil: in that sense "God never tempts any man: and if any man be drawn to the commission of sin, it is only through the influence of his own indwelling corruptions, [James 1:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.13-14)." But God gave him this command, in order that it might be seen, both by Abraham himself and by the world at large, whether he had grace to execute it.

God, in all his dispensations towards the Jews in the wilderness, had the same object in view, as Moses informed them at the commencement of their journeying in the wilderness, [Exodus 16:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 16.4), and afterwards reminded them just previous to their entrance into Canaan, [Deuteronomy 8:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 8.2). He warned them also that at all future periods they must be on their guard not to be drawn aside from Jehovah by persons pretending to a divine authority, even though they would work miracles in confirmation of their word, or utter prophecies that would eventually come to pass; for that God would allow such impostors to arise, in order to put their fidelity to the test, and to give them an opportunity of evincing what was in their hearts, [Deuteronomy 13:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 13.1-3).

God himself indeed needed not for his own information such events; for he knew what was in man, whether it was brought forth into act, or not: but they themselves could know it only by seeing the actual operation of their own principles: and therefore, for the comfort of some, and the humiliation of others, he allowed their principles to be brought to the test, and afforded by his own dispensations an occasion for their internal graces or weaknesses to display themselves, [2 Chronicles 32:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 32.31).

It is for the same end that God at this day suffers obstacles of various kinds to be put in the way of his people; he does it, that their faith may be tried; and that, if it stands the trial, redoubled benefits may accrue unto them, [1 Peter 4:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.12-13). Know then that these trials, which are to so many an occasion of falling, are intended of God to be to you an occasion of approving your fidelity to him.

The prospect of some advantage, or of the gratification of a forbidden appetite, presents itself to you: and by it God says, "Now, which will you prefer—my honor, or your own lust? Look to it, that you be steadfast in your obedience to me."

In like manner, when persecution arises because of the word, or when any who profess godliness makes shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience, it is all permitted by God, as far as you are concerned, on purpose to detect your hypocrisy, if you are unsound at heart; or to evince the steadfastness of your faith in him.

Make then this improvement of every temptation, that you may come out of it as gold from the furnace, and prove by means of it "the sincerity of your love, [2 Corinthians 8:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.8)."

***~~2. From the graces which carried him through it, the different offices of faith and fear—~~***

The particular end of this temptation was to discover whether Abraham truly "feared God, [Genesis 22:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 22.12);" and God acknowledges that that point was by the obedience of his servant clearly ascertained. Now by "fear," is meant such a *reverential awe of the Divine Majesty, as swallows up all other considerations, and determines us to fulfill God's will at all events*. It annihilates all other fear, and constrains the soul to reply to its persecutors, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, you judge; for I cannot but proceed in my duty to him, though the whole world would combine to oppress me, [Acts 4:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.19-20)."

But fear alone would be ineffectual to prevail in so great a warfare: therefore faith comes to its aid; and presents to the mind the promises of God; the promise of effectual aid in the conflict, and of an abundant recompense after it. Without this support, our spirit would soon fail: but under an assurance that God will fulfill his word, we are enabled to go forth "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might," and to defy the whole universe to "separate us from the love of Christ." The two would always be united; the one to operate as a stimulus, and the other as an encouragement. If either are lacking, our obedience will be very imperfect: it will want that *holy reverence*which we would ever maintain even in the midst of our most exalted joys, or that *filial confidence*which so peculiarly pleases and honors God.

See then, brethren, that, however difficult the service is which God requires of you, it be performed resolutely and without delay. Let no consideration under Heaven weigh with you, any more than the dust upon the balance, in opposition to any known command. And while you labor to obey God's precepts, hold fast his promises with a confidence that nothing can shake. Listen not to any carnal reasonings, however specious they may be, when once you know what the Word of God requires. Duty is yours: outcomes are God's. Labor you to execute your part; and leave him to fulfill his, in his own way, and in his own time. Let it suffice for your encouragement, that "he is faithful who has promised;" and, that "what he has promised he is able also to perform."

***~~3. From the outcome of his trial, the benefit of approving ourselves faithful to our God—~~***

"By this act of his he was justified." As a sinner, indeed, he had been accepted by God forty years before, as soon as ever he believed in that promised "Seed who was to descend from him, and in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed," and in that sense he was justified by faith alone, [Romans 4:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.3-5); [Romans 4:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.9-11); [Romans 4:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.20-22). But James says truly, that "he was justified by works also, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar, [James 2:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.21-23);" for by that act he was justified in his own conscience, and justified before the whole world.

A tree may be good: but how shall it be known to be good but by its fruit? It is then only perfect when it is laden with fruit, and thus demonstrated to be good. Just so, Abraham, though previously pardoned and accepted by his God, was then proved and evidenced to be a righteous character, and in a state of acceptance with God, when by this astonishing act of obedience he displayed the reality and efficacy of his faith. From that time he was honored with that glorious appellation, "The friend of God," and, for his further encouragement, God confirmed all his promises to him with an oath, [Genesis 22:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 22.16); that by these two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, he might have the stronger consolation. Nay more, his Isaac, whom, in his mind and purpose, he had sacrificed, was now restored to him: and O! to what unspeakable advantage! What delight would he henceforth feel in a son so given, and so restored to him as from the dead!

Just so, shall we find it in vain to sacrifice anything to the Lord? Shall we not, in proportion to the greatness of our sacrifices, and the willingness with which they have been offered, have an evidence in our souls that we are in favor with God? Will not the very exercise of such grace demonstrate to us the truth and efficacy of the grace we have received? And, when we have shown such love to God, can we entertain any doubt of God's love to us? Shall we feel any difficulty in concluding, that, if we have so chosen and loved God, "he has first chosen and loved us, [John 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.16). [1 John 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.10)."

Moreover, God will give unto us the witness of his Spirit, assuring us that we are indeed his children, and his friends, [Romans 8:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.16). [1 John 3:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.24). This is what Paul has plainly taught us to expect. He tells us, that "tribulation works patience; and patience, experience; (that is, an evidence arising from trial, such an evidence as the gold has of its purity after having stood the trial of the fire,) and experience, hope; and hope makes not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who is given unto us, [Romans 5:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.3-5)."

Fear not then, any of you, to sacrifice your very Isaac to the Lord, if called to it. The trial may be painful at the time, but "it shall be to your praise and honor and glory, as well as unto the praise and honor and glory of your God, at the appearing of Jesus Christ, [1 Peter 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.7)."

***~~4. From the typical aspect of the whole, the transcendent love of God to man—~~***

It is said, that "Abraham received Isaac from the dead in a figure." Many interpret this expression as importing that the whole of this history was a type or figure of our redemption by Christ. Whether that is the true import of the expression or not, I can have no doubt but that the whole transaction was typical of that most astonishing and incomprehensible mystery, the gift of God's only-begotten Son to "die for our sins, and to be raised again for our justification."

Behold, then, the love of God in this! Do we admire the obedience of Abraham to the Divine command? O! what shall we say of the love of Almighty God, who, without any necessity on his own part, or any solicitation on ours, gave his only-begotten Son, not to die by a wound which inflicted pain only for a moment, but under the curse due to sin, even to the sins of the world? From all eternity did he ordain this sacrifice; and never drew back from his purpose.

When his Son entreated with strong crying and tears to have the cup taken away from him, it was not removed; but was given him to drink, even to the dregs. With his own hand too did the Father inflict the fatal wound: yes, "it pleased the Lord Jehovah to bruise him! [Isaiah 53:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.10)." For Isaac, the Lord accepted a substitute, a ram caught in the thicket: but no substitute was found for the Lord Jesus Christ, seeing that he himself was the substitute for a guilty world: and, in token that his sacrifice had made a full atonement for sin, he was raised from the dead, and exalted to Heaven, to carry on and perfect there the work which he had begun on earth.

What shall we say to this love? The height, the depth, the length, the breadth of it, how unsearchable! how utterly incomprehensible! Turn then your eyes from Abraham to Abraham's God. Or, if you look at Abraham at all, let it be not so much to admire, as to imitate, his obedience. "He saw by faith the day of Christ, and seeing it, he rejoiced;" and counted no sacrifice too costly with which to honor him.

Your views of Christ, and of the Father's love in him, are incomparably clearer than ever Abraham's were: and therefore, if it is possible, your obedience would be proportionably more prompt, more self-denying, and more firm. *Let then every lust be sacrificed to God without reserve, and every interest too that may stand in the way of your duty to him.*So shall you be children of Abraham indeed, and be acknowledged the friends of God by him, who will reward every man according to his works.

***~~#2326~~***

***~~MOSES' CHOICE~~***

***~~[Hebrews 11:24-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.24-26)~~***

"By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward."

IT is a great advantage to us to be conversant with the Holy Scriptures, not only because from them we learn the *principles*of religion, which can be derived from no other source, but because we see in them *examples*which have upon them the stamp and impress of God's approbation, and which therefore we cannot presume to disapprove. Had any individual of the present day acted as Moses did in the instance before us, we should, I doubt not, have all agreed in condemning him as inconsiderate, enthusiastic, and unwise. Not knowing his motives, or not giving him credit for them, we could not have formed a correct judgment of his actions: but we are sure that the choice which Moses made, however absurd it might appear to those more immediately connected with him, was truly commendable. In bringing it before you, I shall endeavor,

***~~I. I shall endeavor to explain Moses' choice—~~***

Two things must here be noticed:

***~~1. Moses' conduct—~~***

He was, next to Pharaoh, the first man in the whole land of Egypt, having been adopted by Pharaoh's daughter as her son, and being regarded as such by Pharaoh himself. All the pleasures, the riches, and the honors that man could possess, with the exception only of the imperial diadem, were within his reach, or rather he was in the actual enjoyment of them. Yet the whole of these did he renounce: and not at a season when by reason of youth he was unable to form a just estimate of them, or by reason of old age was incapable of enjoying them, but in the very prime of life, at the age of forty, when he had arrived at full maturity both of body and mind, [Exodus 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 2.11). [Acts 7:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.23); and when, from "being learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, [Acts 7:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.22)," he was able to relish them with a zest, which a vulgar and uninstructed mind knows nothing of, and which nothing but refinement can bestow. All these he sacrificed voluntarily and with a determined purpose, "refusing" to be recognized any longer under the august character of Pharaoh's daughter, and choosing rather to appear in his own proper character as a child of Abraham.

While Moses was in this exalted station, his brethren according to the flesh were suffering under the most grievous oppression. To unite himself with them, was to subject himself to all the reproach and cruelty under which they groaned. Yet he acknowledged them as his kindred: and voluntarily participated with them in their lot: descending thus at once from the highest eminence in the kingdom, to the lowest state of degradation and infamy.

To obtain a just view of this conduct we must notice,

***~~2. The principle from which it proceeded—~~***

We are told that he acted thus "by faith." By faith, he saw that the Hebrews were exclusively "the people of God;" and that, as such, whatever they might endure from man, they were and must be happy; since God, the God of the whole earth, was their God, and esteemed them as his own peculiar treasure. He saw too, that the reproach that was cast upon them was "cast upon them for the sake of Christ," in whom they professed to believe as their future Messiah, the Savior of the world. Had they chosen to intermarry with the Egyptians, and become one people with them, they would have suffered nothing from Pharaoh, but would have fared as the rest of his subjects. But, holding fast their regard for Abraham as their father, and their expectation of Christ as to spring from one of his descendants, they exposed themselves to all the injuries which an envious, cruel, and despotic monarch could inflict: so that their reproach was properly "the reproach of Christ," Christ himself being the object of it, and suffering it, as it were, in the person of his people. See [Acts 9:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.4). [Colossians 1:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.24).

He saw yet further, that the afflictions which they endured for Christ's sake would in due time be recompensed; and, that all who participated in their sufferings, would partake also of their reward. As the patriarchs looked by faith to a heavenly city, and a heavenly country—so Moses looked to a heavenly reward; in the prospect of which he was willing to forego all that this world could give him, and to sustain all that his most potent and malicious enemies could inflict upon him. Indeed in this view he esteemed reproach to be "riches," "great riches," yes, "greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt!"

But as the wisdom of this conduct may be doubted,

***~~II. I shall endeavor to vindicate Moses' choice—~~***

It may be thought that this measure was unnecessary, inexpedient, and absurd, but:

***~~1. Moses' choice was necessary—~~***

Circumstanced as he was, it befit him to act as he did. He was, I grant, greatly indebted to Pharaoh's daughter: and he was bound to regard her with all the duteous affection which belonged to the relation into which he had been adopted by her. But his duty to the God of Abraham was paramount to every other: and he would have sinned, if he had merged his fidelity to God in his regards for any creature whatever. All the pleasures which he had enjoyed, however innocent in themselves, were "pleasures of sin," as long as he continued to acknowledge the God of the Hebrews as his God, and the faith of the Hebrews as his faith. The neglecting to confess his God was tantamount to denying him: and, if he continued any longer to deny God, he could expect nothing but to be denied of God in the day of judgment. The measure therefore which he adopted was not unnecessary, but absolutely necessary, both for his peace in this world, and his happiness in the world to come.

***~~2. Moses' choice was expedient—~~***

It might be supposed, that if he had continued, like Joseph, at the head of the Egyptian government, he might have mitigated their sorrows, even though he would never be able to effect their release. But he had a secret intimation from God, that the time of their deliverance drew near, and that he was to be the instrument by whom they would be delivered. And so strong was this impression upon his mind, that he engaged in the work rashly and prematurely, without any direction from God; and thereby reduced himself to the necessity of fleeing to a foreign land, to avoid the punishment to which his own unwarrantable temerity had exposed him, [Acts 7:24-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.24-29).

The question in his mind was, What duty to his God required? and he was not at liberty to calculate then on matters of expediency, or to weigh in the balance of carnal reason the possible or probable issues of different events. His duty was to obey God; and to leave to God to save his people in his own time and way, according to his own infallible and eternal counsels.

***~~3. Moses' choice was wise—~~***

Moses looked beyond the concerns of time, and acted with eternity in view. He knew that his pleasures, riches, and honors, however great they were, were only "for a season;" and that the afflictions to which he was about to subject himself, were also "for a season" only; whereas the recompense which his sacrifices would insure him, was eternal. What comparison then could there be between these things? Or what room was there for hesitating one moment which he would prefer? If he gained the whole world, what would it profit him, if he lost his own soul? Or if, by sacrificing the whole world, his soul would be saved, what reason could he have to regret the sacrifice? His choice then was that which sound wisdom dictated, and true piety inspired.

In truth, this is no other choice than what all the Prophets and Apostles in their respective ages have approved. *David*"would rather be a door-keeper in the house of his God than dwell in the tents of ungodliness, [Psalm 84:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 84.10);" And why? Because, as he tells us in another psalm, "A little that a righteous man has, is better than the riches of many wicked, [Psalm 37:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 37.16);" better in its possession, better in its operation, better in its end.

*Solomon*was of precisely the same mind, [Proverbs 15:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 15.16-17).

*Paul*, like Moses, actually "suffered the loss of all things, and accounted them but rubbish, that he might win Christ, [Philippians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.8)." Having made a sacrifice of everything, so far was he from feeling himself impoverished by his loss, that, "when he had nothing, he accounted himself as possessing all things, [2 Corinthians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.10);" and actually "took pleasure in all his necessities and distresses, from a consideration of the benefit which would accrue from them to himself, and the glory to his Lord and Master, [2 Corinthians 12:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9-10)."

*Peter*confirms this view of the subject most fully, and in terms too which are peculiarly applicable to the case before us: for he declares, that the sufferings of God's people are "Christ's sufferings;" that from them arises much honor to God, and much benefit to the soul; and that they are rather to be accounted grounds of joy, than occasions of sorrow and regret, [1 Peter 4:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.12-14). To these I will only add the testimony of our Lord himself, who, in the epistle to the Church of Smyrna says, "I know your works, and tribulation, and poverty; but you are rich, [Revelation 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.9)."

After such testimonies as these, we cannot but approve the conduct to which our text refers.

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

***~~1. How erroneous are the views of worldly men!~~***

*The men of this world set a high value on the things of time and sense, while sin appears in their eyes but a light and trivial evil.* By them, suffering is more dreaded than sin: and the loss of an opportunity of honoring God, is of no account in comparison with the loss of great honors and great emoluments. They will strain every nerve to combine the irreconcilable services of God and mammon: and, if the one or the other must be sacrificed, they will hold fast their pleasures, their riches, and their honors, instead of parting with them for the Lord. "To forsake all and follow Christ," is to them a hard lesson, which they cannot, and will not, learn.

But the example of Moses must be followed by us all, so far at least as our circumstances are similar to his. We must all confess Christ openly before men. We must all unite ourselves to his people, and take our portion with them. Whatever cross may lay in our way, we must take it up cheerfully, and bear it after him, "going forth to him outside the camp, bearing his reproach, [Hebrews 13:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.13)."

We are not indeed of necessity called to renounce the highest distinctions: because they may be held, and the most important offices in the state may be executed, in perfect consistency with our duty to God; as no doubt they were by Daniel. But if the hope of acquiring eminence, or the fear of losing it, deters us from the performance of any duty, or lead us to a compliance with any sin, we are then called to take the decided part that Moses did, and to forsake all for Christ.

Let us then not seek great things either for ourselves or our children: or, if we possess them, let us not seek our happiness in them, but in God alone. If we possess not his favor, though we had kingdoms in our possession, we are unquestionably poor: but if he is our God, then, though bereft of everything else, we are unquestionably rich!

***~~2. How blessed they are who live by faith!~~***

It is true that the whole of their life is foolishness in the eyes of unconverted men: and they must of necessity meet with many reproaches and persecutions for the truth's sake. But, notwithstanding all that they are, or can be, called to endure for righteousness' sake—the very worst of their portion is better than the best of the portion of ungodly men. The best that the world can give, is its treasures: and the worst that the believer can receive, is its reproaches and persecutions. Yet is the reproach which the believer sustains for Christ's sake, greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt.

How superior then must the believer's portion be in the eternal world! If the believer in a dungeon is richer, and happier, than the unbeliever on a throne—then what must his portion in Heaven be, when compared with the unbeliever's in Hell!

Be not dejected, then, you who are despised or persecuted for Christ's sake, but by faith view your privileges, and expect your reward. Our blessed Lord has set forth the worst of your portion, and pronounced you in the midst of all "blessed." And he has set forth the best of the unbeliever's portion, and denounced nothing but "woes" against him in the midst of all! [Luke 6:20-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 6.20-26).

*Take but eternity into your estimate of things, and have respect unto the recompense of your reward in Heaven; then will every sacrifice be small, every suffering light, every service easy.* In such a frame you will rejoice to suffer shame for Christ's sake, and account death itself, though of the most violent and cruel kind—a subject of desire rather than of fear, of blessedness rather than of sorrow! [Philippians 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.17).

***~~#2327~~***

***~~FAITH SEEING THE INVISIBLE GOD~~***

***~~[Hebrews 11:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.27)~~***

"He endured, as seeing him who is invisible!"

NOT any one of all the catalogue of worthies in the Old Testament, not even Abraham himself, stands higher than *Moses*; who, when possessed of all that rank and affluence could confer on man, abandoned it all, that he might participate in the lot of his oppressed and persecuted brethren. He was assured, indeed, that God would compensate to him all the losses which he sustained; and "he had respect to the recompense of that reward." But he would not have been able to maintain his stand as he did, if he had not found a present support from God.

On his first attempt to deliver Israel, about forty years before, he had failed, partly through impetuosity, in killing the Egyptian, and partly through fear, in fleeing from the grasp of his enraged enemies. But now he maintained his steadfastness, and executed his commission with undaunted courage; because he saw, by faith, that God who is invisible to the eye of sense: "he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible!"

This remarkable expression will lead me to show,

***~~I. The peculiar faculty with which believers are endowed—~~***

By nature, they possess no other faculty than is common to the unregenerate world: and to represent piety as proceeding from, or as indicative of, a new sense, is to open a way for the grossest wild enthusiasm, or rather for the entire exculpation of all who do not possess it: for, a man who never possessed the sense of seeing or hearing could contract no criminality whatever by acting as one who was blind or deaf. Yet, if I may be allowed to follow the paradoxical expression of my text, the believer has a faculty peculiar to himself, a faculty of "seeing" an object that is invisible, even "God himself, who is invisible."

***~~Believers do see the invisible God—~~***

God, it is true, is, in his essence, invisible: "he dwells in the light which no man can approach unto; and no man has seen him, or can see." Yet faith brings him so powerfully before the mind of believers, that they may be said to "see" him; because they are as much assured of his presence, as if they beheld him with their bodily eyes. We all know the effect of glass of different forms; either as magnifying an object, so as to make it visible, notwithstanding its smallness; or as bringing it near to us, notwithstanding its vast distance, within the reach of our visual organs. I mean not to say that there is any just comparison between these artificial aids and faith; but, when we consider what we ourselves can effect by such helps, we may, without any great difficulty, imagine the power which God himself has given to faith.

***~~They have a realizing sense of his presence with them—~~***

It is manifest that Moses saw God with him, just as Elisha "saw the chariots of fire and horses of fire" that encompassed him. Thus does every believer, in proportion as his faith is lively and operative, view God present with him.

God is with his people, as a *witness*, to observe their conduct.

He is with them, as a *protector*, to deliver them from danger.

He is with them, as a *provider*, so that, "though lions lack and suffer hunger, those who serve him shall lack no good thing."

He is with them, too, as a *comforter*, who will make their consolations to abound above all their afflictions.

He is with them, as a *rewarder*will he recompense into their bosom all that they either do or suffer for him.

In all these views, Moses, no doubt, beheld him: and to the very end of time will he thus reveal himself to all his believing people.

This being their exclusive privilege, I will proceed to state,

***~~II. The advantage they derive from it in the divine life—~~***

From this realizing view of the Divine presence, believers obtain,

***~~1. Firmness in acting—~~***

Moses was undaunted by the menaces of Pharaoh, [Exodus 10:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 10.28-29). Moses warned Pharaoh, that all the first-born of Egypt, even of Pharaoh's own household, would die that very night; and that the very courtiers around the throne would come bowing to him, and entreating him with all the children of Israel, to depart out of the land: and that then he would go, whether Pharaoh would consent to it or not, [Exodus 11:4-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 11.4-8).

Such is the firmness which a sense of the Divine presence will give to every believer. Whoever it be that threatens him, or whatever the threat contain, his answer will be, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, you judge: for we cannot but do the things which God has required of us, [Acts 4:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.19-20)."

Thus it was that faith operated in the Hebrew Youths. In vain was the furnace lighted before them: they could not be diverted from their purpose to serve the Lord. Their reply to the enraged monarch was decisive: "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto you, O king, that we will not serve your gods! [Daniel 3:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 3.17-18)."

Trials to the same extent are not at this day experienced among us: but there will be enough to prove the courage of all who profess to serve the Lord: and while the unbelieving are intimidated and turned back, the true believer will "endure, as seeing him who is invisible."

***~~2. Composure in suffering—~~***

It was no grief to Moses that he had given up all the treasures of Egypt, or that he had undertaken to "suffer affliction with the people of God." "The yoke of Christ to him was both light and easy." And thus it is to every true believer. The Apostles, when beaten for their fidelity to Christ, "rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his sake, [Acts 5:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.41)." And Paul and Silas, with their feet in the stocks, and their backs torn with scourges, "sang praises to God at midnight! [Acts 16:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.25)."

Thus, in all cases where a man has a realizing sense of the Divine presence, the cross which he has to bear is rather a ground of glorying than of complaint, [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.14), and causes him to "rejoice and leap for joy, [Matthew 5:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.12)." The light of God's countenance lifted up upon him, infinitely more than counterbalances any bodily pains; so that, however his afflictions may abound, his consolations outweigh them all.

***~~3. Confidence in conflicts—~~***

Moses, as we have seen, had no doubt about the outcome of the contest between him and Pharaoh. And to every true believer this will be a self-evident truth: "If God be for me, who can be against me? [Romans 8:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.31)." Extremely animated is the prophet's description of this state of mind in [Isaiah 50:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 50.7-9), "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 (the weakest creature in the universe) will eat them up."

To this effect Paul speaks at large, defying all the creatures in the universe to separate him from the love of Christ, [Romans 8:33-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.33-39). So, let the weakest of true believers be able to say, "I have set the Lord always before me;" and he may confidently add, "Because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved! [Psalm 16:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 16.8)."

***~~Let me now address,~~***

***~~1. The timid—~~***

"Who are you, that you would be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; and forget the Lord your Maker, [Isaiah 51:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.12-13)." Is God not present with you, as well as with others? Or, "Is his ear heavy, that he cannot hear; or his hand shortened, that it cannot save?" Dishonor him not by unbelief. Consider how awful will be the fate of "the fearful and unbelieving, when they shall take their portion in the lake of fire and brimstone, [Revelation 21:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.8);" and "fear not him who can only kill the body, and after that 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! [Luke 12:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.4-5)."

***~~2. The enduring saint—~~***

How was God glorified in Moses, when he thus braved the wrath of Pharaoh, and took on him the charge of carrying the whole nation of Israel to the promised land! His extremities were great: but was he ever forsaken? Was not the sea opened for him; and manna rained down from Heaven; and water given him from the stricken rock? Go forward then; and know, that "your strength also shall be according to your day, [Deuteronomy 33:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 33.25)." Your trials may succeed each other, like the waves of the sea: but "he who endures unto the end, the same shall be saved! [Matthew 24:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.13)."

***~~#2328~~***

***~~MOSES' FAITH IN RELATION TO THE PASSOVER~~***

***~~[Hebrews 11:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.28)~~***

"By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel."

When people speak upon the comparative excellencies of faith and works, they are very apt to overlook the relation which they bear to each other: whereas *there is no true faith which is not productive of good works; nor are there any works truly good, which do not proceed from faith as their root and principle*. "Everything that does not come from faith, is sin, [Romans 14:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.23)"

Supposing that they could exist separately, the preference might justly be given to good works: because they are the end, while faith is only the means to that end. Detach from each other the root and fruit of a tree; and no one will hesitate to prefer the fruit. But they cannot be separated; they are to each other as the cause and effect: and in proportion as any one values good works, he ought to value faith, as their originating and productive cause.

True it is that there are works which are reputed good, and which may be done by an infidel or a heathen: and these, imperfect as they are, are certainly better than a barren and inoperative faith: but *works that are truly good can proceed from faith alone: and the peculiar excellence of faith is, that it is the spring and source from whence all good works proceed; and from whence they will naturally proceed, as its genuine fruit and offspring.*

It is on this account that the Apostle accumulates in the chapter before us so many instances of a living faith. A person ignorant of true Christianity would expatiate only upon the works: but the Apostle traces the streams to the fountain-head; and fixes our attention upon that faith from whence they flowed.

In considering the faith of Moses as recorded in the text, we shall mark,

***~~I. The particular act by which it displayed itself in him—~~***

God had determined to destroy the first-born both of man and beast throughout all the land of Egypt, with the exception of those belonging to his own oppressed and afflicted people. But when the destroying angel would be sent forth to execute this judgment, how would the Hebrews be distinguished by him? And how would he know where to strike, and where to forbear?

***~~For the preservation of his people God appointed peculiar means—~~***

The whole account is given us in the twelfth chapter of Exodus. A lamb was to be killed by every family of the Hebrews. Its blood was to be poured forth into a basin, and to be sprinkled with hyssop upon the lintel and the side-posts of their doors; (not upon the threshold; for that sacred blood was not to be trampled on by any,) and the flesh of the lamb was to be eaten, (not raw, or boiled, but roasted with fire,) with bitter herbs, and with certain forms, which it is not to our present purpose to specify. The blood so sprinkled was to serve to them as a pledge of their security, and to the angel as a token that he was to pass over that house which was so protected. And in remembrance of this deliverance, the ordinance so instituted was ever after to be called the *Passover*.

***~~These means Moses used in faith—~~***

He gave the necessary directions to the Jewish people, who instantly carried them into effect. In this both Moses and the people showed the power of faith. Moses doubted not but that in the space of a few hours God would inflict the threatened vengeance on all the first-born of Egypt: nor did he doubt but that the simple means proposed would prove effectual for the preservation of the Hebrews. He did not attempt to station any sentinel at the door of one single family for the purpose of calling the attention of the angel to the blood that had been sprinkled; but with perfect confidence addressed himself to the observance of the ordinance that had been appointed, having no thought that any other precaution was necessary, nor any fear that the destroying angel would through ignorance or inadvertence exceed the commission he had received.

***~~And these means proved effectual—~~***

At midnight the judgment was executed throughout all the land of Egypt, so that there was not a single house wherein the first-born was not dead, even from the first-born of Pharaoh himself to the first-born of the captive that was in the dungeon. But of the first-born belonging to Israel, not one was hurt, "the destroyer had not touched so much as one of them."

Without dwelling unnecessarily upon this peculiar act, by which faith displayed itself in Moses, I shall proceed to notice,

***~~II. The corresponding act by which it is to show itself in us—~~***

The whole human race, as transgressors of the law, are liable to the wrath of an avenging God. But God has appointed means of safety to all who will make use of them in faith. He has sent his own Son to die as a sacrifice for sin; and has appointed him to be the only means of our preservation.

***~~We are to seek deliverance through him, precisely as the Hebrews did through the paschal lamb—~~***

This is told us by Paul, who says, "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us, [1 Corinthians 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 5.7)," thus identifying the Lord Jesus with the paschal lamb as the type, of which He is the great antitype.

**The first thing we have to do, is to sprinkle our souls with his blood.** There is no other protection than this for any human being. We may bring all the good works which ever were wrought by any mortal man, and they will not avert the stroke of divine justice. No means will suffice, but those which God himself has appointed. Whether we see any suitableness in the means or not, they are to be used, and used in faith. Nothing is to be substituted as more conducive to the end; nothing to be added, to increase the efficacy of this simple ordinance. The Lamb of God is slain: his blood is poured forth: we are by faith to sprinkle it on our souls, assured that, when we have put ourselves under that safeguard, "there can be no condemnation to us, [Romans 8:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.1);" but that, "Christ will be to us as a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land, [Isaiah 32:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 32.2)." If we attempt to substitute anything for this, or to add anything to it, we destroy its efficacy altogether, and render it of no avail, [1 Corinthians 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.11). [Galatians 5:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.2-4).

**We must also feast upon the flesh of this great Sacrifice, in token of the full confidence which we have in our safety through him, and as the means of deriving fresh supplies of strength from him**. How strongly has our blessed Lord himself inculcated this truth, "Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, you have no life in you, [John 6:53-56](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.53-56)." We must eat it indeed, "with the bitter herbs" of repentance, and "with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth, [Exodus 7:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 7.8) with [1 Corinthians 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 5.8)." But we must eat it as "a feast," yes, as "a feast of fat things, [Isaiah 25:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 25.6);" and we shall then find it a source of all needful strength unto our souls, [Isaiah 25:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 25.4).

***~~We shall then find in him the same security—~~***

Of all the first-born that belonged to Israel, the destroyer "touched not" so much as one. And who ever perished, after having fled to Christ for refuge, and sprinkled their souls with his atoning blood? In what instance did the destroyer ever overlook the sign, or the sign prove an ineffectual guard against his uplifted arm? If Christ ia "an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world," and his blood is able to cleanse from all sin, then may all trust in him as "able to save them to the uttermost; nor shall anyone that trusts in him be ashamed or confounded world without end."

***~~Here then we see, in a striking point of view,~~***

***~~1. In what an awful state they are who neglect the Gospel of Christ!~~***

The people of Egypt, unconscious of the impending judgment, or unconcerned about it, retired to rest as secure as usual. But at midnight, when they were all asleep, it came upon them; so that "there was a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt: for there was not a house where there was not one dead, [Exodus 12:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 12.30)." In that instance the cry was among the survivors.

But among ourselves, when persons are summoned to their great account, there is no apprehension excited, lest they would have fallen as monuments of God's wrath. We mourn the loss of them as relatives; but as for the vengeance that may have seized them in the midst of their security, we think not of it.

But of the thousands that are daily swept away, how fearful is the doom of the generality! What shrieks, what cries are uttered by them on their first entrance into the presence of their God! Could we but hear one of them, O how would it pierce our inmost souls! Yet, if we did hear it, our terror would operate with no more abiding effect, than did that of the Egyptians; who no sooner found that the Israelites were "entangled in the land," than they pursued after them with the most vindictive wrath to destroy them.

But, beloved, know that the judgments of God will be executed, whether you believe it or not. Your presumptuous security will avail you nothing. What did it avail the antediluvian world? Did not the deluge come the very same day that Noah entered into the ark? and did not all experience the fate which they had been warned to expect? Yes; every day and hour brought it nearer to them: and in like manner "your judgment also lingers not, and your damnation slumbers not, 2 Peter 2:2-5." Awake then from your slumbers, you foolish virgins, before the Bridegroom comes: and as you know not at what hour he will come, lose not another in fleeing from the wrath to come, and laying hold on eternal life!

***~~2. How happy and secure they are who truly believe in Christ!~~***

Realize to yourselves one moment the different states of the Israelites and the Egyptians on that night, when the angel was spreading death and destruction all around him. Behold the consternation that pervaded all the families of Egypt; and then look within the houses of the Hebrews, and behold their serenity and joy. O what a contrast! And all through the influence of faith!

So it is at this hour with those who truly believe. They know what judgments are coming on the whole world of the ungodly: they know, that they themselves deserve them, as much as any other persons whatever: they know that nothing which they can do can avert the stroke of Divine justice: but they know that God has appointed means of safety: they know that, however inadequate according to our vain conceits the means may be to the end, they are, and shall be, effectual to all who use them in faith: they are conscious that they have used them; and that they renounce every other ground of hope, and place their dependence solely on the blood of the Paschal Lamb.

They are feasting too from day to day on the flesh of that Paschal Lamb; and they have no wish but to cast off the yoke of Egypt, and to prosecute their journey to the promised land.

The peace which others have, if it may be called peace, is owing to their disbelief of their danger: but the peace of the godly arises from their view of the sufficiency of Christ to save them, and of the faithfulness of God to all who hope in his promised mercy.

Take then my beloved brethren, the Israelites for your example. Take them at that precise moment, with "their loins girt, and shoes on their feet, and staffs in their hands, and eating their sacrifice in haste," ready at any instant to obey the Divine mandate, and to go forth to Canaan under the Divine guidance and protection. Then shall you be Christ's disciples indeed: and then "shall you eat, while others are hungry; and drink, while others are thirsty. Then shall you rejoice, while others are ashamed; and sing for joy of heart, while others cry for sorrow of heart, and howl for vexation of spirit, [Isaiah 65:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 65.13-14)."

To the people of Israel this day was enjoined to be observed even to the latest generations as the most memorable day in the whole year. And well might that night be termed, "a night to be much observed unto the Lord, [Exodus 12:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 12.42)." Methinks, the annual return of it, to those who bore in remembrance the mercies then given to them, could not fail of filling their souls with the most lively joy, since then, and not until then, was their deliverance complete.

But what was their redemption when compared with that which we have experienced, and which was completed as on this day, when our Lord and Savior rose from the dead? Until then, he himself lay a captive in the grave: but then he triumphed over all his enemies, and "led captivity itself captive."

If you say, 'True, but my enemies still live and are mighty; and they still follow me, and will reduce me again to my former bondage.' Fear not; for though they will follow you, they shall not prevail against you; and shall only follow, in order that God's power may be the more magnified in their final destruction. Assert then your liberty: go forth under the Divine protection: harbor no unbelieving fears.

Is there a sea before you? It shall open, and afford a dry path for your feet.

Is there then nothing but a dreary wilderness before you, where you will be exposed to all manner of dangers and necessities? Fear not; for "you shall dwell on high—your house of defense shall be the munitions of rocks. Bread shall be given you, and your waters shall be sure—your eyes too shall behold your King in his beauty; they shall behold the land also that is very far off! [Isaiah 33:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 33.16-17)."

Are you laden with any measure of Egyptian gold? Bring it forth with you, and consecrate it to the service of your God. It was with that, that Moses furnished the tabernacle of old: and God will make use of your talents also, whatever they may be, for the enriching of his sanctuary, and the advancement of his glory.

Come then, you who know the value of redemption, and pant after perfect liberty; and *behold the Paschal Lamb, now already roasted by the fire of God's wrath*, and set before you, as it were, on the table of the Lord. There is the very Paschal Lamb: come feast upon it with love and gratitude:  
eat it, and be satisfied:  
eat it, and be strengthened:  
eat it, and live for evermore!

Christ himself invites you, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood, has eternal life; and I will raise him up to the enjoyment of it at the last day: for my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed!"

***~~#2329~~***

***~~THE WALLS OF JERICHO THROWN DOWN BY FAITH~~***

***~~[Hebrews 11:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.30)~~***

"By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days."

HOW *men*could be affected by any principle, is easy to be conceived; because the human mind is susceptible of the strongest impressions from everything that is submitted to its consideration. But what connection any principle can have with *inanimate creatures*, does not at first sight appear.

Take the principle of love, for instance. We may love the flowers which are growing in our garden: but any farther than our love operates to secure attention to those flowers, they will be altogether unaffected by it.

There is a peculiarity in *the principle of faith which does not attach to any other principle whatever; namely, that it has respect to God, and calls forth his power; and is therefore capable of influencing everything*, whether in Heaven or earth. A surprising effect of it is mentioned in reference to the walls of Jericho, which, through its powerful operation, were thrown down.

In speaking of faith as illustrated by that event, we shall be led to notice,

***~~I. The distinguishing properties of faith—~~***

Wherever a living faith exists in the soul, it will approve itself by,

***~~1. A patient observance of the appointed means—~~***

The means appointed for the capture of that fortress were certainly very peculiar. The Israelites, who were encamped against it, were to walk in procession around it seven successive days in perfect silence; the trumpets only blowing. On the seventh day, they were to go round it seven times, and then to shout; and at the precise moment that they shouted, the walls were to fall, and open for them a free passage into the city. These means they used. They did not pour contempt upon them as unsuited to the end: nor did they grow weary in the use of them: nor did they attempt to add anything to them. They felt that it was not for them to question the wisdom of God's appointments, but to obey them: and therefore they followed implicitly the Divine command in [Joshua 6:1-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 6.1-16), and "marched around the city seven days."

Such is universally the operation of true faith. *God has appointed means for the salvation of the soul*. He requires that we would repent of all our past sins; that we would believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as having offered an atonement for sin; and that we would give up ourselves to Christ, to be washed by his blood, and to be renewed by his Spirit.

In order to further this work within us, he has prescribed means to be used by us both in public and in private.

In public, we must attend on his ordinances; because, as he is peculiarly honored by them, so he is pleased to make them in a more especial manner the channels of his gracious communications to our souls.

In private, we must read his blessed word, and meditate upon it, and pray over it; and, through the influence of his Spirit, endeavor to mortify the whole body of sin. We are not to be questioning the use and efficacy of these means, but to use them in obedience to our God. True faith will not say, like Naaman, "Are not Abana and Pharpar better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them and be clean? [2 Kings 5:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 5.12)." but it will go to Jordan, according to the direction given, and expect the blessing only in the use of those ordinances which God has prescribed.

***~~2. A confident expectation of the promised end—~~***

At the appointed time the Jewish army "shouted," not doubting but that they would see the predicted event accomplished, [Joshua 6:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 6.20). In all the instances of faith recorded in this chapter, this is a very prominent feature. *Noah*believed that he would be saved in the ark. *Abraham*believed that Isaac would be restored to him even from the dead.

Thus it is at this day. Faith never questions either the power or veracity of God: it assures itself, that "he is faithful who has promised;" and that what he has promised he is "able also to perform." *It is not from the means that faith expects the end; but from God, in and by the means*. The adequacy of the means to the end comes not within its contemplation. If a posterity, innumerable as the stars of Heaven, is promised to Abraham and Sarah, they consider not their own advanced age, but believe, that the promise, however improbable according to the course of nature, shall be fulfilled. Though the promise, after it was first given, was deferred for twenty years, they still hold fast their faith, and expect its accomplishment in due season.

Thus shall we also, whatever difficulties may arise in our Christian course, expect a successful outcome, assured that "none who come to God through Christ shall ever be cast out," and that "of those whom the Father has given to Christ, not one shall ever be plucked out of his hands."

This is the very description which the Prophet Isaiah gives of faith as to be exercised under the Christian dispensation: "It shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God! we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation. For in this mountain (the Church) shall the hand of the Lord rest; and Moab (the representative of all the Church's enemies) shall be trodden down under him, even as straw is trodden down for the dunghill: and he shall spread forth his hands in the midst of them, as he who swims spreads forth his hands to swim: (making the very resistance of his enemies the means of advancing his own glory:) and he shall bring down their pride together with the spoils of their hands: and the fortress of the high fort of your walls (be they even as strong as those of Jericho,) shall he bring down, lay low, and bring to the ground, even to the dust! [Isaiah 25:9-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 25.9-12).

In addition to the properties of faith, our text leads us to notice,

***~~II. The sure effects of faith—~~***

If exercised to the end without wavering, faith will surely issue in,

***~~1. The believer's triumph—~~***

Down fell the walls of Jericho at the appointed moment, and its garrison became an easy prey to the Jewish army.

What is there which the believer cannot effect under faith's influence? "If he has but faith as a grain of mustard-seed, he can remove the most deep-rooted mountains with a word, or plant a mulberry-tree in the depths of a tempestuous ocean." Nothing can stand before persevering faith. Mountains of *guilt*, though so high as to reach unto the heavens, are "cast by it into the very depths of the sea! [Micah 7:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 7.19)." *Lusts*, though deeply rooted as Hell, shall be plucked up! [Romans 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.14) [Ezekiel 36:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.25-27), and the tender plants of divine grace have stability, and growth, and fruitfulness amidst all the storms and tempests, whether from without or from within, that can disturb and agitate the soul! [Hebrews 13:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.9). [1 Peter 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.10).

Does *Satan*summon all his forces to withstand its power? He finds the believer inaccessible to his assaults, [Ephesians 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.16). [1 John 5:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.18), and is put to flight before him, [James 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.7); and in a little time "he shall be bruised under the feet" of the least and weakest of God's people! [Romans 16:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.20). "All things are possible to him who believes," because his *faith brings down Omnipotence to his aid*; so that, though earth and Hell combine against him, he sets them at defiance, and is "more than conqueror over all! [Romans 8:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.37)."

See this exemplified in the combat of David and Goliath. In the eye of sense, it was impossible for David to succeed. In the eye of faith, it was impossible for him to fail. The outcome is well known: the stripling slew the giant, and cut off his head with his own sword. And so shall the weakest stripling among the soldiers of Christ prevail, making the very weapons of his adversaries the means of advancing and completing his own triumphs.

***~~2. The glory of God—~~***

The whole land of Canaan trembled at this event, just as they had before done at the report of all the wonders which had been wrought in Egypt, [Joshua 2:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 2.10-11) with 6:27. Had anything been left for the Jewish army to execute, the glory might, in appearance, have been shared by them: but when nothing but a shout proceeded from them, the work was manifestly the Lord's alone.

And thus it is that God will work in behalf of all who trust in him. He makes the measure of our faith, the measure of his blessing; saying to us, "According to your faith, be it done unto you." It is owing to our lack of faith that we behold so few manifestations of his power and grace: "He does not many mighty works among us, because of our unbelief, [Matthew 13:58](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.58)." But where faith is in exercise, he honors it with peculiar approbation, passing by all other graces that are combined with it, and commending faith alone: "O woman, great is your faith!" "Your faith has saved you; go in peace! [Matthew 15:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 15.28). [Luke 7:50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.50)."

Faith is the grace which, above all others, honors God; and, as "those who are strongest in faith give most glory to him, [Romans 4:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.20)," so to those who exercise it he will not fail to give the brightest discoveries of his glory: for what he said to Martha, he says to every one of us, "Said I not unto you, that, if you would believe, you would see the glory of God! [John 11:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.40)." Yes, he does say it, and will fulfill it, not only in the progressive triumphs of his grace, but in the ultimate and everlasting possession of his glory!

Men may deride our expectations, as it is probable the men of Jericho, after a few days, did the harmless processions of the Jewish army: but God will in due time make bare his arm, and gain himself the glory and the victory.

***~~We will now endeavor to improve this subject,~~***

***~~1. In a way of caution—~~***

Everyone imagines that he has saving faith. But, if we come to inquire into the objects and grounds of men's faith, we find it for the most part, nothing but presumption. They expect Heaven; but not in the way of God's appointment, but in some way of their own, which he has never prescribed. Instead of repenting deeply of their former sins, and fleeing to Christ for refuge, and living in the constant observance of public and private ordinances, according to God's command; they are supine and careless, as if nothing at all was to be done by them as evidential of their faith.

Now I would ask, what would have been the outcome, if the Jewish army had proceeded on this plan? Suppose they had said, 'We think it absurd to look for the destruction of this fortress by faith alone: we will form a trench round the city, and batter it down with the implements of war:' would they have succeeded? Or suppose they had said, 'We will expect the city to fall, as God has said; but to what purpose are these repeated processions? We shall spare ourselves that fruitless trouble, which will only expose us to the derision of our enemies.' Or suppose they had said, 'We will use the appointed means; but in order to make success doubly sure, we will form a trench, which shall both add to our security, and prevent their escape.'

Do we imagine that on any one of these plans they would have been crowned with success? We feel no hesitation in saying, that they would have been disappointed of their hope; because they proceeded not according to the commands of God. Yes, we doubt not but that the wrath of God would have broke forth against them, as it did on Uzza, because David in carrying up the ark was inattentive to the order that Moses had prescribed, [1 Chronicles 15:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 15.13).

Know then that, however confident our expectations of Heaven are, they will end in disappointment, if we presume to alter, or neglect, or add to, the means which God himself has ordained.

I beg you all to consider this—you especially, who have never yet repented in dust and ashes; you who have never given yourselves to reading, and meditation, and prayer; you who are not yet prostrating yourselves at the foot of the cross, and relying on Christ as your only hope. I beseech you to consider, how awfully you delude your own souls, while you promise yourselves the enjoyment of the heavenly Canaan.

The same too I must say to those, who, while they profess to rely on Christ, are making their own works either a joint ground of their hope, or a warrant for their faith in Christ. Your victory can be gained only in the way that it was gained at Jericho—you must use all the means which God has enjoined, without either taking from them or adding to them: but you must expect success from God alone, and be content that he alone be glorified.

***~~2. In a way of encouragement—~~***

Many are discouraged because of their own extreme weakness, and because, though they have diligently used the appointed means, they seem not to have advanced at all, or to have any nearer prospects of success. But what if Israel had yielded to such discouragements, and ceased from their labors before their work was done? True it is, that the precise time for the interposition of Jehovah was made known to them; but it is concealed from you: nevertheless it is as much fixed in the Divine counsels with respect to you, as it was to them: and "in due season you shall surely reap, if you faint not."

What if you are unequal to the task; was not the sound of rams' horns, and the shout of the people, weak? Only be content to be weak, and you will then be strong; because "God will perfect his own strength in your weakness." See how God himself chides—yet supports your fainting mind, [Isaiah 49:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.24-25). And see what a frame of mind, though in the midst of all your conflicts, you are privileged to possess, [Isaiah 50:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 50.7-9).

Follow then the advice which God himself gives you; and, "though walking in darkness, stay yourselves upon your God." And, if still unbelieving fears arise, chide yourselves, like David, and say, "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance and my God! [Psalm 43:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 43.5)."

In a word, let this saying sink down into your ears, and animate and sustain your souls, "Believe in the Lord your God, 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)." Only go on a little longer in a patient continuance in well-doing, and the victory is yours; and glory, and honor, and immortality are yours also!

***~~#2330~~***

***~~RAHAB CONCEALING THE SPIES~~***

**[Hebrews 11:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.31)**

"By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient."

FAITH is usually considered merely as an assent to testimony; *human*faith having respect to human testimony, and *divine*faith having respect to divine testimony. Hence the subject of faith is supposed to lie within a small compass. But there is not a more comprehensive subject within the whole circle of man's duties: for while faith has respect to everything which God has spoken, it operates in everything which man does.

The chapter before us shows how inexhaustible the subject is. Faith was the one principle by which all the saints there enumerated were influenced: and in every distinct instance its operations were widely different: so that, though in appearance the same subject is brought under discussion, it is presented to us in so different a light as to assume a new character.

In considering the fate of Rahab, we shall be led to show,

***~~I. To what did Rahab's faith have respect—~~***

The whole account of Rahab is continued in the second chapter of Joshua: and to that chapter we must refer as forming the groundwork of this discourse. It will there be found, that, though she was an inhabitant of Canaan, and had in her earlier life been notoriously dissolute, she was now a believer in the God of Israel. What she had heard of him had fully convinced her, that he was the only true God. This she openly avowed to the spies whom she had received: "The Lord your God, he is God in Heaven above, and on earth beneath! [Joshua 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 2.11)." But it was not in a mere general way that she acknowledged Jehovah: she had *just*and *distinct*views of him; and had respect to:

***~~1. His purposes as sure—~~***

She knew that God had "given to Israel the land" of Canaan for their inheritance, verse 9; and that his purpose respecting it would infallibly be accomplished. As the Creator and Governor of the universe, he had a right to dispose of everything in it: and, having transferred the land to Israel, he would surely invest them with the possession of it.

Thus will true faith present God to our view as a mighty Sovereign, who orders everything both in Heaven and earth. It will reveal him to us as having shown distinguishing favor to his peculiar people, in that, while he has passed by the angels who sinned, and left the greater part of mankind also in utter darkness—he has revealed to them a Savior, yes, and "revealed him in them" also as the hope of glory [Galatians 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.16). He has also prepared an inheritance for them from the foundation of the world, even the heavenly Canaan; and called them to take possession of it as his special gift, through the merits and mediation of his Son Jesus Christ, [Romans 6:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.23). The manner of taking possession of it also he has ordained, even by faith in Christ; by whose blood they shall be justified, and by whose Spirit they shall be renewed. All this will faith regard as unalterably fixed in the Divine counsels; so that those who possess the first-fruits here, shall infallibly reap the harvest of salvation in the eternal world, [2 Thessalonians 2:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.13-14).

***~~2. His perfections as unbounded—~~***

While she was convinced that his power was irresistible, she, though of an accursed race and of an abandoned character, had no doubt but that God's mercy would extend even to her, if she sought it with her whole heart. Hence of her own accord she received, and hid, the spies; and dismissed them in peace, in hopes that she and her family might be spared: and all the security she required was an oath in Jehovah's name, that no evil would be inflicted on her, when the threatened vengeance would be poured out on all others.

And is she not here also *an example to us?*Yes! by faith we must survey him in all his glorious perfections: we must view him as a God of all grace, whose mercy is infinite; who delights in the exercise of mercy; who "waits to be gracious" to the very chief of sinners, "keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin," and following them with this tender expostulation, "Turn, turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?" "As I live, I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he would turn from his wickedness and live."

To this our faith would have especial respect; because it is our great encouragement to seek his face. To know that "the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse from all sin;" that "whoever comes to God by him shall never be cast out;" and that "where sin has abounded, grace shall much more abound;" to know this, I say, and to realize it by faith, is the richest consolation which a broken-hearted sinner can enjoy!

At the same time we should, like her, assure ourselves, that "God's counsels shall stand, and that he will do all his will!" We should bear in mind the records of his former interpositions, and from them be convinced that "there is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord, [Proverbs 21:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 21.30)." *Theoretically*indeed we do acknowledge this: but how few feel it *practically!*How few are so impressed with the idea as to despair of escaping his wrath, but by casting away the weapons of their rebellion, and laying hold on his offered mercy!

But this part of our subject will come more properly before us, while, in our further investigation of her faith, we show,

***~~II. How Rahab's faith operated—~~***

From the instance to which the text directs our attention, we see:

***~~1. Rahab's faith operated in a way of holy fear—~~***

Rahab did not merely participate in the terror which had seized all the inhabitants of Jericho, a terror that served only to harden their hearts, but a fear associated with a consciousness of her demerits, and a determination to seek for mercy.

Until this holy fear is wrought within us, there is no true faith in our souls. The very first work of the Holy Spirit is "to convince us of our sins;" to show us our desert and danger; to make us sensible that "we are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Until we are brought to the condition of those on the day of Pentecost, who "were pricked to the heart," and with a deep sense of their guilt and misery cried out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"—there is nothing done effectually towards our conversion to God, nothing that can give any hope of the salvation of our souls.

***~~2. Rahab's faith operated in a way of intense desire—~~***

Her desire of mercy swallowed up every other consideration. She forgot all which passes under the name of patriotism, conceiving that she had a prior and a paramount duty to the God of Israel. So sure was she that God's purposes would be fulfilled, that she did not for a moment imagine that any efforts of hers to destroy the spies would at all avail for the protection of her countrymen. She saw that this was an opportunity afforded to her for the preservation of her soul; and, if she let it pass unimproved, she would only involve herself in the ruin that could not possibly be averted. She therefore sided with Jehovah and his people against those who were related to her according to the flesh; and determined at the risk of her life to cast in her lot with the people of the Lord.

Thus should we also postpone every consideration under Heaven to the honor of God and the salvation of our souls. The love of our country is confessedly an important duty, as the love of our parents also is: but when our duty to God stands in opposition to the wishes or interests of our earthly superiors—the line of duty plainly is to serve God whatever the outcome. The direction given to the Church under the character of a spouse, is this: "Hearken, O daughter, and incline your ear; forget also your own people, and your father's house; so shall the King have pleasure in your beauty: for he is your Lord God: and worship Him, [Psalm 45:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 45.10-11)." Our Lord's declaration to his followers is plainer still: "If any man comes to me, and hates not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yes and his own life also—he cannot be my disciple, [Luke 14:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.26)." The kingdom of Heaven is a pearl, for which faith will part with all in order to possess it.

***~~3. Rahab's faith operated in a way of unreserved obedience—~~***

Every direction that was given to her, she readily complied with; and in no instance departed from the terms on which alone she was encouraged to expect mercy. Nor will anyone who truly believes that he shall be an object of sparing mercy, account any of God's commandments to be grievous. His determination through grace will be to be found in God's appointed way, fulfilling all righteousness, and "walking in all the statutes and ordinances of the Lord blameless."

One particular commandment given to her I will here notice as of more than ordinary importance, namely, that of binding the scarlet line in her window, as the memorial of her faith, and the means of her preservation. Had this been neglected, she had perished with the rest of her countrymen: but by this her safety was secured.

There is a corresponding command given to everyone that desires to obtain mercy, which above all he will be anxious to obey, namely, that of *believing*in Christ, [1 John 3:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.23), and "abiding in him," as the branch *abides*in the vine, [John 15:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.4-7). The injunction to abide in him is repeated four times. Faith will teach him, that, if he is not found in Christ, the sword of divine vengeance will surely cut him off, as that of the destroying angel did the first-born, whose doors were not sprinkled with the blood of the paschal lamb.

In a word, as soon as true faith is formed in the soul, the one inquiry will be, "Lord, what will you have me to do? [Acts 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.6)," and from that time the believer's desire will be to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."

In the account given of her faith, we see,

***~~III. What Rahab's faith obtained—~~***

***~~1. A deliverance from that destruction which came on all her unbelieving neighbors—~~***

In Jericho nothing that breathed was left alive, with the exception of Rahab and her family: but to them the promised mercy was given. And who that believes in Christ shall perish? *Against the unbelieving world the deluge of God's wrath will prevail, and sink them all without exception into everlasting perdition.*But to those who are in Christ, no evil shall accrue. They are in the true ark, against which the winds and waves shall beat in vain. In the great day of the Lord, there will be a separation made between the sheep and the goats; nor shall one of either flock be found through any mistake confounded with those whose nature so widely differs from his own. Not a lamb shall be found among the goats; nor a goat among the sheep. Each will have the portion assigned him by the Judge of all—the *unbelievers*in the lake of fire and brimstone; the *believers*in the regions of eternal bliss. Among "the chaff that shall then be burned up with unquenchable fire," not the smallest grain of wheat shall be found! [Amos 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 9.9).

***~~2. A portion among the chosen people of the Lord—~~***

This is particularly noticed in the subsequent history of Rahab: she was incorporated with Israel, and made a partaker of all their privileges, [Joshua 6:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 6.25). Just so, though we have been aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, we shall be saved by the blood of Christ, as soon as we believe in him; and from being "strangers and foreigners shall become fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God, [Ephesians 2:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.12-13); [Ephesians 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.19)." Look through the Holy Scriptures, and see all that belongs to the saints, either in this world or the next—and you will read only the catalogue of your own possessions! For "all things are yours, when you are Christ's, [1 Corinthians 3:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.22-23)."

***~~3. The transcendent honor of being brought into the nearest relation to Christ himself—~~***

Who would have thought that this poor Canaanite, of an accursed nation, and once of an abandoned character, would be chosen of God to be an instrument of bringing into the world the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Savior of the world? Yet so it was: Salmon, one of the progenitors of Christ, married her: and their son Boaz married Ruth, the Moabitess, from whom descended in an immediate line Obed, Jesse, David.

Will the parallel hold good here also? Shall we, on believing in Christ, become thus intimately united with him? Yes, and far more intimately; for she, as his ancestor, was one with him only corporeally; whereas by faith we become "one spirit with him, [1 Corinthians 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.17)." As relating to the flesh, we are no nearer to him than others; but as relating to the spirit, "we are members of his body, [Ephesians 5:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.30)."

***~~From this subject then we learn:~~***

***~~1. How sovereign God is in the dispensation of his gifts!~~***

Of all that were in Jericho, we do not read of any others to whom true faith was given. Others, like the devils, believed, and trembled; she alone "believed unto righteousness." It is pleasing to reflect, that, among the most avowed enemies of God—there may be some hidden ones, whose heart God has touched with true repentance, though their views of salvation are very indistinct; and who shall be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus; while millions, who have enjoyed the brighter light of the Gospel, will be cast out into outer darkness!

It is a rich consolation also to know, that the most abandoned sinner in the universe is not beyond the reach of mercy; but that, as God's grace is his own, and he distributes it as he will, we may all without exception look to him for mercy with a full confidence of acceptance through the Son of his love. Let any one that is discouraged through a sense of his own unworthiness, remember Rahab, and, like her, cast himself upon the mercy of the God of Israel.

***~~2. How certainly faith shall avail for the salvation of the soul!~~***

We are told by James, that "Rahab was justified by her works, [James 2:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.25)." But can anyone suppose that the mere act of receiving the spies, and dismissing them in peace, formed her justifying righteousness before God? Assuredly not! for it was attended with great infirmity, seeing that she had recourse to falsehood to conceal her conduct, because she knew not how to trust in God to protect her from the consequences of it, [Joshua 2:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 2.4-6). But, as imperfect as her works were, they evinced the sincerity of her faith, and proved her to be indeed in a justified state before God. If then a faith, so obscure as her's was, and so imperfect in its actings, justified her before God—then let no one doubt but that a full affiance in the Lord Jesus Christ shall assuredly bring him into a state of acceptance with God, and ultimately prevail for the salvation of his soul.

***~~3. How certainly faith will be productive of good works!~~***

It is in confirmation of this sentiment that James adduces the examples of Abraham and of Rahab as justified by their works. He is showing that faith without works is dead; and that their works proved them to be possessed of a living faith.

Undoubtedly her faith was, as we have before observed, not very distinct, though we doubt not but that it was afterwards enlarged, as her knowledge of the Mosaic writings increased. But indistinct as it was, it wrought, and powerfully too, yes, so powerfully as to outweigh every other consideration that could operate upon her mind.

And thus it will do in everyone who is truly saved. It will work, and effectually too, to overcome the world, [1 John 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.4), and purify the heart, [Acts 15:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 15.9). If then it does not evidence itself by such *fruits*as these, let us not imagine that we are possessed of true saving faith; for if it does not work thus, our faith is no better than the faith of devils!

Whoever then professes to be savingly interested in "the grace of God which brings salvation," let him learn from it, what it invariably teaches to all who have received it: "to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world, [Titus 2:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.11-12)." If any have this hope in him, let him walk as Christ walked, and "purify himself even as he is pure, [1 John 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.6); [1 John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.3)."

***~~#2331~~***

***~~THE POWER OF FAITH~~***

***~~[Hebrews 11:32-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.32-35)~~***

"And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, 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."

THIS is a surprising chapter altogether. Respecting faith, as a principle, the generality of men think but little. Indeed, a considerable degree of prejudice exists against it in the minds of many; as though it were a mere fantasy, which tended to discourage all human efforts, and to generate delusions in all who give themselves up to its influence. But the account here given of it is truly surprising.

The Apostle himself seems to have been at a loss for utterance on so vast a subject. The instances of it which he had enumerated, and those which crowded upon his mind, almost overwhelmed him: "What shall I more say? for the time would fail me to declare" all that my recollection suggests to me.

That we may enter in some little measure into the Apostle's views of this divine principle, let us consider,

***~~I. How marvelous are the records faith—~~***

We will not go to the instances above recited; for then indeed the time would fail us: nor will we enter at all minutely into those which are heaped together in my text; for then also it would be impossible for us to do justice to them in one discourse. I will only, and as briefly as possible, call your attention to,

***~~1. The persons enumerated—~~***

These are not placed in the order of time in which they lived; for Barak was before Gideon, and Jephtha before Samson, and Samuel before David. The Apostle mentions them just as they occurred to his thoughts: as he did also the facts to which he afterwards refers: for they also are promiscuously specified, without any reference to the persons whom he had mentioned, or the times at which the events themselves occurred. But they all afford most astonishing instances of the power of faith.

Gideon, with only three hundred men, and with no other weapons than trumpets, and pitchers with lamps concealed in them, and these broken, with a shout, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon," with no other weapons, I say, than these, prevailed over all the hosts of Midian! [Judges 7:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 7.7); [Judges 7:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 7.19-22) with 8:10.

Barak, with no more than ten thousand men, subdued an immense army, of whom not so much as one was left alive, [Judges 4:6-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 4.6-16).

Samson also, when the Spirit of God came upon him, slew thirty Philistines, and one thousand more with the jaw-bone of a donkey, and three thousand more at his death, [Judges 14:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 14.19); [Judges 15:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 15.15); [Judges 16:27-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 16.27-30).

Jephtha, too, under the same divine influence, subdued the Ammonites [Judges 11:23-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 11.23-33).

As for David, his victories were numberless.

And Samuel, though not a warrior, showed himself strongly under the influence of faith, [1 Samuel 12:16-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 12.16-25).

Just so, did Elijah, and Elisha, and many other prophets in their season.

If it is asked, in what respect were these examples of faith? I answer, All these exploits were done in obedience to a divine impulse, and in dependence on God's promised aid.

But, without dwelling on the acts of these individual worthies, let us notice, rather, what my text leads us to,

***~~2. The acts specified—~~***

Who would imagine that faith would ever possess such powers as are here ascribed to it? Who would suppose that by it men would "put to flight mighty armies," and "subdue whole kingdoms?" Yet this has been done, and done by faith also: for all the kingdoms of Canaan were subdued by Joshua's faith; as were the surrounding kingdoms of Moab, and Syria, and Edom, with many others, by the faith of David.

And who would think that this principle would prevail to shut the mouths of lions; yes, and to quench the violence of fire, so that a furnace heated to the utmost extent of man's ability, would not be able to singe a hair of a person's head? Yet was the former of these done by the faith of Daniel; as was the latter, by the faith of his three companions, Shadrach, Meshech, and Abed-nego.

Even to the raising of the dead has this availed: for, through the exercise of it, Elijah raised the son of the widow of Zarephath, [1 Kings 17:17-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 17.17-24), and Elisha raised the son of the Shunamite woman, [2 Kings 4:18-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 4.18-37).

Now of these things I say, they are utterly incredible: and, in declaring them, I seem to demand an assent that is perfectly unreasonable. For, how would it be that such a hidden principle of the mind would ever enable a man to work such miracles as these? Truly, the whole account seems to be nothing but "a cunningly-devised fable," that yet can impose on none who give to it one moment's consideration. But it is true, and the very truth of God.

Nor will it appear incredible, if we duly consider the way in which faith operates. It is God himself who engages to do the thing: and *faith calls into action his Almighty arm*(and with him all things are possible). So that, inasmuch as faith, insures his effectual aid, it may be truly said, that "all things are possible to him who believes."

But let us further notice,

***~~II. How diversified are the operations of faith—~~***

There is nothing to which it may not be applied, and nothing for which it will not equally avail. Faith will alike enable us,

***~~1. To do anything—~~***

By it has "righteousness been wrought," in its utmost extent. Not only has *political*righteousness been given for the government of kingdoms, as to Asa, Hezekiah, and Josiah; but *moral*righteousness, in a degree never produced by any other principle under Heaven. Where do we find such holy characters as those recorded in the Scriptures? Yet it was faith which made them what they were: and faith, in proportion as it exists in the soul, enables every child of God to resemble them. The weakest of the human race shall "out of weakness be made strong;" and prevail, not only over men, but over all the powers of darkness also, [Romans 8:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.37). [Ephesians 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.16). [James 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.7), if only he relies on the promise of the faithful God. His faith, though it were only small as a grain of mustard-seed, would be abundantly sufficient for all the powers that the occasion called for, [Matthew 17:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 17.20).

***~~2. To obtain anything—~~***

By faith "have promises been obtained;" even such as, according to human expectation, could never have been fulfilled. To Abraham and Sarah was the birth of a son delayed, until there remained not the smallest probability of its accomplishment, nor a possibility, according to the course of nature. And David's establishment on the throne of Israel was as unlikely, according to man's estimate of things, as any event that could be conceived. But never, in any single instance, did a promise, apprehended by faith, fail him who relied upon it, [Joshua 23:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 23.14). Take, then, the promises of God (no matter how great they are, or how small); and only rely on them, and plead them before God in prayer; and sooner shall Heaven and earth pass away, than you be disappointed of your hope. "You may ask what you will," provided only it be contained in a promise, and "it shall assuredly be done unto you."

***~~3. To suffer anything—~~***

It is scarcely to be conceived what sufferings men have inflicted on the people of God. Of these we have many instances mentioned in the verses after my text, verse 36, 37. But, perhaps, the instance more immediately referred to in my text is one recorded in the book of Maccabees, respecting a woman and her seven sons, who endured all that the cruel tyrant Antiochus could inflict upon them; and refused all his offers of deliverance; having an assured prospect of a recompense from God, even an eternal recompense, which would infinitely outweigh all that it was in the power of man to grant, 2 Maccabees verse 7.

Similar instances we have had in our own favored land, in the days of popish persecution: and God alone knows to what any of us may yet be called, before we die. But, if faith will enable men to bear up under such sufferings as we read of in the Scriptures of truth, how much more will it qualify us for sustaining the common evils of life; yes, and enable us to "glory in tribulation," so far as God shall see fit to subject us to its assaults.

To all this I may add,

***~~III. How extensive its benefits—~~***

There is not a blessing to the body or the soul, for time or for eternity, which faith will not secure.

***~~1. Do we not need pardon?~~***

There is not a sin of which we may not obtain forgiveness, if we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, "whose blood cleanses from all sin." The declaration of an inspired Apostle is, "All who believe are justified from all things, [Acts 13:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.39)."

***~~2. Do we not need peace?~~***

"Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, [Romans 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.1);" yes, by "believing in this unseen Savior, we may rejoice in him with a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory, [1 Peter 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.8)."

***~~3. Do we not need holiness?~~***

Every part of holiness will faith supply. It will "work by love," and "overcome the world," and "purify the heart, [Acts 15:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 15.9)." It is by faith only that we can "behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ:" and by that shall we be "changed into his image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord, [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.18)."

***~~4. Do we not need glory?~~***

Never shall the believer die;  
never shall he perish;  
never shall he come into condemnation;  
[John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.16); [John 11:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.25-26).

Eternal life is his, both in title and in the actual commencement; and it shall be his in the great day of Christ's appearing. Then shall that be said to you, as it was to blind Bartimaeus, and to her who washed her Savior's feet with her tears; not, 'Your importunity, or your penitence, has saved you;' but, "Your faith has saved you, go in peace."

**Now, let me press upon you a due improvement of this subject.** Concerning faith, I would say, strive,

**1. To ascertain the existence** **of saving faith—**

True is that declaration of the Apostle, "All men have not faith, 2 Thessalonians 3:2." Nor is it true of those only who professedly reject the Gospel, but of multitudes also who profess to have received it. It was to such that Paul addressed those words: "Examine yourselves, whether you be in the faith: prove your own selves, [2 Corinthians 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 13.5)." You are not to imagine that a mere assent to the Gospel is the faith that is required of you. Saving faith is a divine principle in the soul—a principle productive of such fruits as were brought forth by the worthies enumerated in this chapter. In order to ascertain whether your faith is genuine, read the chapter carefully; and, after every successive instance of faith, inquire how far it has operated the same change in you. In truth, if we compare our experience with that of the saints of old, the best among us, instead of valuing himself upon his faith, will find reason to doubt whether he has yet attained any faith at all.

**2. To appreciate the importance** **of saving faith—**

Lightly as men in general think of faith, there is no principle whatever that is of such importance to the soul as that. Love, indeed, is in some respects greater than faith; but it must be remembered, that *faith is the root from which alone true love can spring*. Where faith is lacking, there can be no union with Christ, and consequently no Christian grace: for "without Christ we can do nothing." "Without faith, whatever we may do, it is impossible to please God, verse 6;" and, consequently, without faith we can have no hope of eternal life. How solemn are those words which our blessed Lord commissioned his disciples to proclaim throughout the world! "Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature: he who believes and is baptized, shall be saved; and he who believes not, shall be damned! [Mark 16:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 16.15-16)." Know then, that, in this subject, life and death are set before you: and that, as in this world, so to all eternity, "According to your faith it will be unto you."

**3. To obtain an increase** **of faith—**

Very remarkable is the answer given by the disciples to an injunction which they had received relative to the forgiving an offending brother. When he told them, that if a brother would offend seven times in a day, and as often repeat his acknowledgments, they would renew to him their pardoning grace, they said, "Lord, increase our faith! [Luke 17:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 17.5)." But what had faith to do with this? One would rather suppose that they would have said, "Lord, increase our love." But their request argued a juster view of divine truth. They did indeed stand in need of love; but it could spring from nothing but faith; and would infallibly be produced by faith: and hence they presented the fittest petition that it was possible for them to offer. Let the same petition, then, proceed continually from your lips. Unbounded are your calls for this divine principle; and the more you excel in faith, the more will you excel in every Christian grace.

**4. To have** **faith as the one governing principle of your life—**

It is "by faith you are to *walk*," "by faith to *stand*," by faith to *live*continually: as the Apostle 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)." You have seen how wholly the saints of old gave themselves up to its influence: go and do likewise; that, having lived by faith, and "died in faith," you may receive "the promise which God has promised you, even eternal! life, verse 39."

***~~#2332~~***

***~~GOD'S ESTIMATE OF HIS PEOPLE~~***

***~~[Hebrews 11:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.38)~~***

"Of whom the world was not worthy!"

THESE words are introduced in a parenthesis; and are intended to obviate an objection, which might weaken, if not make void, the foregoing statement. The Apostle has been insisting upon the *operations and fruits of faith*; and has adduced a great variety of instances in which its power has been displayed.

Those who wrought such stupendous works by the power of faith might be supposed to be objects of high and deserved admiration; but those who suffered so many things under its influence might be thought to have merited their afflictions: whereas, in truth, the world itself, even that very world by which they were so persecuted, was not worthy of them.

Let us consider,

***~~I. God's record concerning them—~~***

It is obvious that *there is an immense difference between God's estimation of his people, and that in which they are held by the ignorant and ungodly world*.

***~~The world accounts the saints as unworthy of itself—~~***

This appears from the manner in which the world uniformly treats the saints. In the days referred to by the Apostle, multitudes of the saints were tortured on account of their piety; many "had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yes, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented; they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth, verse 35-38." And these are the persons to whom this testimony is given, that "the world was not worthy of them."

In the days of Christ and his Apostles, the same enmity against vital godliness displayed itself continually. Our blessed Lord, though confessedly without spot or blemish, he was "despised and rejected of men:" his whole "nation abhorred him," and combined to demand his crucifixion; preferring even a murderer before him. His Apostles too, as he himself had forewarned them, were "hated by all men for his sake," and were counted as "the filth of the earth and the off-scouring of all things," precisely as the godly in the days of Jeremiah had been before them. Compare [Lamentations 3:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 3.45) with [1 Corinthians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.13). Paul was certainly not behind any in wisdom or piety; yet of him was it said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth; for it is not fit that he would live! [Acts 22:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 22.22)."

And is it not thus at this time also? I appeal to all, Whether the very circumstance of a person being zealously devoted to the service of his God does not uniformly bring a stigma upon his character, so that, even though he would be the most active, and benevolent, and blameless of mankind—he will he regarded as weak and noxious in that particular? If from peculiar circumstances a man of piety is led to take a prominent part in the diffusion of true religion, I ask: Will not the world account him unworthy of their esteem, their company, their protection? Let the opprobrious names which are given to such characters, and the contempt with which they are treated, and the injuries which with impunity are inflicted on them, determine this point. He can know little either of the opinions or conduct of those around him, who does not see, that at this hour, no less than in former times, "those who are born after the flesh persecute those who are born after the Spirit;" and that "the enmity of the serpent's seed against the Seed of the woman" is as strong as ever!

But, while the world thus accounts the saints unworthy of itself,

***~~God, on the other hand, pronounces the world unworthy of them—~~***

God regards the saints as "his peculiar treasure above all people upon the face of the earth." In his estimation they are as lights in a dark world, and as "salt" which keeps the great mass of the ungodly from utter putrefaction, [Matthew 5:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.13-14). Nay further, he sends them as leaven to diffuse piety all around them, [Matthew 13:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.33), and to impart to others the blessings which they themselves have received. But the world is unworthy of them: for they know not their value; and are regardless of all the advantages which they might derive from them; yes, they are insensible of the benefits which they are daily receiving from them; and they requite all their kindness with nothing but hatred and contempt.

We have not time to enter minutely into these different particulars: yet we must not pass them over without a few words to elucidate and confirm them.

Go back to the days of the Apostles: see in what light those distinguished servants of God were regarded: see at what a low rate all their labors were appreciated in every city, not of Judea only, but of the whole world. What benefits might the people in every place have received, if they would have listened to the instructions and followed the examples of those holy men!

Just so at this day might they be benefitted by the saints and ministers of the Lord, so far at least as those saints and ministers are themselves conformed to the doctrines and examples of the primitive saints? Indeed the world is, though unwittingly, benefitted by the saints in a very high degree: for by them the tone of morals is raised, wherever they come: and a multitude of institutions for the temporal and spiritual welfare of mankind are set on foot. Institutions, which would never have been carried forward, if the zeal and piety of the godly had not led the way, and the envy and jealousy of the careless been provoked to tread in their steps. The Societies for the Diffusion of the Holy Scriptures, for sending forth Missions to the Heathen, for the Conversion of Jews to Christianity, and for the Education of the Poor, abundantly illustrate this truth.

How far the words of our Lord respecting Jerusalem are applicable to the present day, I pretend not to say: but in that day, the tribulation that came on Jerusalem was greater than had existed since the beginning of the world, insomuch that "if those days of trouble had not been shortened, no flesh would have been saved: but *for the elect's sake*those days were shortened [Matthew 24:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.21-22)." And if only ten righteous men had been found in Sodom, both that city, and all the other cities of the plain, would have been spared. Who can tell then what judgments would be poured out upon the ungodly world, if the saints by their piety and their prayers did not stay the hand of an avenging God, [Genesis 19:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 19.22).

But how these benefits are requited, it is needless to observe. Suffice it to say, that God's estimation of his saints is the same as ever; and his declaration concerning them is, that "the world is not worthy of them."

Let us then proceed to state,

***~~II. The opinions with which this record should inspire us—~~***

It should teach us,

***~~1. To disregard the indignities that are cast upon us—~~***

Man has his "day:" but God has his also: and in the prospect of the ultimate decision of an infallible Judge, it would be a small matter to us to be judged of man's judgment, [1 Corinthians 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.3). When men pour contempt upon us, we should say as our blessed Lord, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." In reference to the persecutors of that immaculate Lamb, the Apostle says, that "through ignorance they persecuted him," and that, "if they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." So, if men really knew what God has done for his chosen people, and how "precious their blood is in his sight," they would not venture to oppose them in the way they do.

Men are beguiled by their own prejudices: they persuade themselves that piety is hypocrisy; and that, to diffuse it, is to "turn the world upside down:" and, in opposing it, "they think they really do God service." Towards them therefore we would feel pity, rather than resentment: and on our own account we would feel nothing but exceeding joy; since we only participate in the lot of God's chosen people, [Matthew 5:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.11-12), and are rendered conformable to the example of Christ himself! [1 Peter 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.13).

***~~2. To adore and magnify our God, who has so distinguished us—~~***

Who is it that has made any of us to differ from the world around us? 1 Corinthians 4:7. Truly, "he who has wrought us to the self-same thing is God, 2 Corinthians 5:5." In ourselves we were no better than others: we were "dead in trespasses and sins," like all around us; and were "children of wrath, even as others." But he pitied us, "he looked upon us while lying in our blood, and bade us, Live! [Ezekiel 16:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 16.5-6)."

O how should we bless and adore him for such amazing love! "Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we would be called the sons of God! [1 John 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.1)." Let us enter into the full spirit of these words of the loving and beloved Apostle: and let us never cease to call on "all that is within us to bless" and magnify our adorable Benefactor, [Psalm 103:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 103.1-3).

***~~3. To walk worthy of our high and heavenly calling—~~***

"What manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conduct and godliness!" Has God called us to glory and virtue? Has he made us "a peculiar people on purpose that we would show forth both the praises and the virtues of him who has called us? [1 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.9)." Let us then "walk as befits saints," and "walk as befits the Gospel of Christ."

If we profess to have received such mercies at the Lord's hands, the world has a right to expect that we would surpass them as much in real excellence, as we do in the privileges of which we make our boast. "What do you more than others?" is a question which they have a right to ask, and to which we ought to be able to return a satisfactory answer. Yes, our very lives should supersede the necessity of a verbal answer; we should be "epistles of Christ, known and read of all men."

If indeed the world be not worthy of us, let them see their inferiority by our lives; and be constrained from what they behold in us to acknowledge, that "the righteous is more excellent than his neighbor." If the difference between them and us be so immense as the Apostle represents it to be, [2 Corinthians 6:14-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.14-18), then let us labor to comply with his direction, and to shine before them with all the splendor of a holy people, "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! [Philippians 2:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.14-15)."

***~~4. To exert ourselves in bringing others to a participation of the benefits which we enjoy—~~***

"Our light is not to be put under a bed, or under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that all around us may receive the benefit." The importance of this in relation to the blessings of civilization is generally acknowledged: and is it less important in reference to the blessings of salvation? Let everyone of us then say with the Church of old, "Draw me, and we will come after you;" that is, if God draws me, I will not come alone, but will draw all I can along with me. If men despise our efforts, and show an utter disregard of the blessings which we hold out to them, let it only stir us up to augmented zeal, and plead with us the more powerfully to exert ourselves the more in their behalf. Let us expostulate with them, as the prophet does, "Why do you spend money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which satisfies not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." And then, if they requite your labors only with hatred and persecution, determine through grace, that you "will gladly spend and be spent for them, though the more abundantly you love them, the less you are loved."

***~~#2333~~***

***~~THE ADVANTAGES ENJOYED UNDER THE CHRISTIAN DISPENSATION~~***

***~~[Hebrews 11:39-40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.39-40)~~***

"These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect."

WHEN we hear or read of the saints of old, we excuse our lack of resemblance to them, from the idea that they were more highly favored than us; and that it would be unreasonable to expect from us of these later days, such high attainments as they made by reason of their peculiar and more exalted dispensation. But this excuse is altogether founded on a mistake: for the disparity between their dispensation and ours is altogether in our favor, as we are expressly told in the passage before us; which will naturally lead me to show,

***~~I. What good things God has given to his people of old—~~***

***~~1. He gave them exceeding great and precious promises—~~***

The promise given to Adam in Paradise was gradually unfolded by successive revelations, until there was such a body of prophecy as exhibited the Savior with the utmost possible precision. His person, work, and offices were all set forth so minutely; that, if the detached prophecies were collected and arranged, there would be found in the Old Testament as just a representation of him as in the Gospel itself. These formed a ground of hope to the Lord's people, who were thus instructed to look to their Messiah as:  
"their Prophet, like unto Moses," to instruct them;  
their Priest, after the order of Melchizedek, to make atonement for them;  
their King, who, sitting as on David's throne, would reign over them, and in them, for evermore.

***~~2. He enabled them to live by faith upon these promises—~~***

Faith, in whoever it is found, is the gift of God: and it was richly bestowed on many, as appears from the chapter before us. We are even astonished at the strength with which it was exercised in many instances, and at the realizing views which it gave of invisible things to those in whom it was found. The instances recorded of it the preceding context are still the brightest patterns for the imitation of the Christian Church.

***~~3. God testified his acceptance of their faith so exercised—~~***

This is noticed in the beginning of this chapter, and again repeated at the close of it. God testified his acceptance of their faith by invariably accomplishing those objects which he had encouraged them to expect, so that in no single instance was any one believer ever disappointed of his hope. However hopeless or even impossible the events might appear according to the judgment of man, every difficulty vanished, and every expectation was fulfilled, as soon as ever the faith of his people had been sufficiently tried, and the time for God's interposition was arrived.

He further testified his acceptance of it by the witness of his Spirit in their souls. There can be no doubt but that they enjoyed in their souls a peace flowing from their affiance in God, and a sense of his love shed abroad in their hearts, together with an assurance of his approbation in the day of judgment. This appears from their "looking for a city which has foundations, and a heavenly country," as "the recompense of their reward;" and from their refusing deliverance from present trials in full expectation of "a better resurrection" to life eternal. And what a testimony has he given in the record which is contained in this chapter; a record which will transmit their names with honor to the end of time!

But, that we may form a just estimate of our blessings, I will proceed to show,

***~~II. What "better things he has provided for us" under the Christian dispensation—~~***

Certainly our privileges are far superior to theirs, for:

***~~1. We have in possession that Savior whom they only looked forward to in the promise—~~***

The first advent of Christ was held forth to them as an object of faith and hope, just as his second advent is held forth to us. But the promise relating to his first coming is now fulfilled. We have seen him accomplishing every prophecy, and performing in himself all that was shadowed forth in the infinitely diversified types of the ceremonial law: and we have, in this very circumstance, such a proof of his Messiahship, as no considerate and candid person can withstand. We have heard all his gracious instructions relative to the way of life; and have already seen his kingdom established in the world. We have seen "the stone that was cut out without hands, becoming a mountain, and filling the whole earth!"

What an unspeakable advantage is this! If Abraham rejoiced when he saw only by faith, and very indistinctly, the days of the Son of man—then what reason have we to rejoice in having this adorable Savior fully revealed in all his beauty, and excellency, and glory! Well does our Lord himself bless his believing people, saying, "Blessed are your eyes which see the things which you see, and hear the things which you hear, [Luke 14:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.23-24)."

***~~2. We have in perfection, those blessings which they enjoyed only in their commencement—~~***

They knew not what solid peace was: their sacrifices, however rich and abundant, could not impart this blessing: they were rather "remembrances of sin," than real expiations; and "could make no man perfect as pertaining to the conscience." "The law made nothing perfect; but the bringing in of a better hope did, [Hebrews 7:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.19)."

Their access to God was that of a servant, who keeps at a distance; our access to God is that rather of a child, who comes to the very bosom of his father, [Ephesians 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.12).

Their communications from God were as darkness, in comparison with the light which we enjoy, [1 Corinthians 2:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.9-10). [1 John 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.8). The prophets themselves did not understand their own prophecies, as we do, [1 Peter 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.12). Not even John the Baptist, who pointed out Jesus as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world," had such just conceptions of him as we have: in this respect "even the least believer that is to be found in all the kingdom of God, is greater than he."

All, not excepting even the Apostles themselves, until the day of Pentecost, had a *veil*upon their hearts, so that they could not behold the glory of God in the face of their Divine Master. "But we, with open and unveiled face, behold, as in a looking-glass, the glory of the Lord, and are changed by it into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord, 2 Corinthians 3:18."

***~~In the view of these glorious advantages, I would yet further draw your attention to them in a way,~~***

***~~1. Of solemn inquiry—~~***

What report does God, and what report does conscience, give respecting us? Are we walking in the footsteps of the saints of old, even of those saints, who "by faith obtained a good report?" We are not to imagine that, while faith wrought so powerfully in them, it will have no visible influence on us. Be assured, that its operation is the same in all ages.

Let me then ask: What effects it has wrought in us? Take the examples of Noah, of Abraham, and of Moses, as set forth in the preceding part of the chapter, and see what resemblance we bear to them. How inferior to them are we in our practice, notwithstanding the superiority of our advantages! Have we not reason to blush and be ashamed at a review of our past lives, and at our misimprovement of the advantages which we enjoy?

***~~2. Of affectionate admonition—~~***

If ever you would "be made perfect," you must both *live*by faith, and "*die*in the faith." To be "walking by sight, when you should walk by faith only," will surely bring you to a far different end from that which you desire and expect. Oh! "listen not to flesh and blood;" but obey sincerely, and without reserve, the commandments of your God. *Set before you the invisible God, who marks all your ways, and tries your very thoughts and heart. Set before you also the invisible realities of the eternal world, the glories of Heaven and the miseries of Hell; and consider which of them is the portion prepared for you.* What a lamentable thing will it be in the day of judgment to see such a one as Rahab, an accursed Canaanite and a harlot, admitted into the kingdom of Heaven, and you yourselves cast out! I beg you to avail yourselves of the advantages which you enjoy; and let them not outcome in your heavier condemnation.

The promise of Christ's second coming to judge the world will as surely be fulfilled, as that of his first coming to save the world has been. And if you look forward to that event, and to the everlasting separation of the righteous from the wicked, O think "what manner of persons you ought to be in all holy conduct and godliness;" and "be diligent that you may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless."

***~~#2334~~***

***~~CHRIST'S PERSEVERING DILIGENCE~~***

***~~[Hebrews 12:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.1-2)~~***

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

WHEN we read the history of the Jews as recorded in the sacred volume, we in general feel no other interest in the events related concerning them, than we do in those which are handed down to us by the historians of Greece and Rome. But, allowing for some local and circumstantial differences, the same things are transacted among ourselves; and the records which we read may serve as a looking-glass wherein to see all that is now passing in the world.

The saints of old, even from righteous Abel to the end of the prophetic age, were called to a life of suffering, and by their sufferings were made perfect. Thus also "must we go through much tribulation in our way to the heavenly kingdom;" and fill up the measure of sufferings which is allotted to us in this valley of tears.

The Apostle having given us a long catalogue of worthies, who had approved themselves faithful unto death, and had thereby "obtained a good report," exhorts us to follow their example, and more especially the example of our blessed Lord himself.

In this passage are contained,

***~~I. An exhortation to run our race—~~***

***~~All of us are called to "run our race with perseverance"—~~***

There is a course marked out for us by God himself: nor can any one err from it, who duly attends to the directions given him in the Holy Scriptures. In this course we are to run. We are not left at liberty to choose a path for ourselves: the race is "set before us," and to that we must strictly adhere.

But we cannot hold on in it without much and continual exertion. Many are the difficulties that obstruct our way: sometimes our path is steep and slippery; and sometimes it is rough and thorny. Often are we wearied in it and ready to faint before our course is half finished. And frequently those who ought most to aid and encourage us, exert themselves to the utmost to impede our progress. But our duty is to run our race "with perseverance;" to hold on until we arrive at the goal, in spite of all our external trials, or inward weakness; and "by patient continuance in well-doing, to seek for glory and honor and immortality." To run well for a season will avail us nothing: we must "endure unto the end, if ever we would be saved."

***~~To this we would be stimulated by the consideration of the many witnesses that surround us—~~***

The saints who have gone before us, having finished their course with joy, are represented as being spectators of our conflicts, and witnesses to us that our persevering efforts shall be crowned with success. In both of these views, the consideration of them is calculated to refresh our spirits, and to quicken our languishing exertions.

Conceive "a cloud," or multitude of departed saints, and more especially of those who ran together with us; conceive them looking upon us with eager solicitude, rejoicing when they behold us rapidly advancing, and ready to weep over us, if at any time they see us on the decline; conceive them crying out to us:

"Press forward; remember me; I once endured the same trials; I, like you, was ready to faint; but, through grace, I held on: and at last I obtained the prize. Hold on then a little longer, and the crown of righteousness is yours, "be not weary in well-doing; for in due season you shall reap, if you faint not!"

I say, let us dwell on this thought; and surely, if ever men running in a race were encouraged by the acclamations of their friends, much more shall we by such animating considerations as these.

Together with this earnest exhortation, the Apostle gives us,

***~~II. Directions to ensure success—~~***

***~~1. We must put away whatever obstructs our progress—~~***

They who are about to run a race need not be reminded of the importance there is to cast off all unnecessary weight, or any long garment which may impede their motion. But in running our spiritual race we are apt to be forgetful of this obvious and necessary caution.

Many things there are which operate as a burden to weigh down our spirits; and to exhaust our strength. *How often do the cares or pleasures of the world divide our attention, enfeeble our efforts, and prevent our advancement in the divine life!*

There is in every one some "sin that more easily besets him," and which, like a flowing robe, diminishes his race in the service of his God. What sin this is, we would be careful to inquire. It will in general be found to be *some inward lust that is constitutionally wrought into us*—or some evil, incident to our situation, our company, or our employment. Whatever it is, whether:  
pride,  
or passion,  
or covetousness,  
or impurity,  
or sloth,  
or intemperance,  
or unbelief,  
or impenitence,  
or self-righteousness,  
or self-dependence  
—we must "put it away."

Whatever tends to divert us from the path of duty, or to hinder us in it, must be sacrificed, if we would "so run as to obtain the prize!"

***~~2. We must direct our eyes to Jesus Christ—~~***

Jesus is here proposed to our view both as our successful example, and as our almighty friend. Never had any other person such a difficult course to run: nor could any other ever have persevered in it. The cross he bore was heavier than we can possibly conceive: nor was the ignominy of it less than the pain: but "he endured the cross and despised the shame:" he looked to "the joy that was set before him"—  
the joy of glorifying his heavenly Father,  
the joy of delivering a ruined world,  
the joy of being forever the acknowledged author of their salvation,  
and in the prospect of having all this consummated, he disregarded all his trials and difficulties, he even "longed to be baptized with his bloody baptism," and continued with unabated ardor until he could say, "It is finished!" and until, in consequence of his victorious career, he was exalted to the "right hand of the throne of God!"

How should we be encouraged by the sight of this our successful pattern! For what are our trials in comparison with his? How richly too are his exertions recompensed, even as ours also shall in due time be, in the full possession of the prize that was set before him!

But the Apostle directs us to look unto Jesus also as our almighty friend. It is he who marked out for us our course, who called us forth to run in it, who holds out to our view the prize, who sits as umpire to award the prize to every one that wins it, and who will bestow it on us with his own hand. He is moreover "the author and the finisher of our faith;" from him proceeds that faith whereby we are stimulated to engage in the race, and that whereby we are enabled to persevere in it to the end. Let us then look at him, and see how sufficient he is to renew our strength, and how interested he is in crowning our efforts with success.

There is a peculiarity in this direction which we must by no means pass over. *The Apostle tells us not merely to look unto Jesus, but, in so doing, to look away from everything else*. We are apt to look:  
at our own weakness,  
at our trials and afflictions,  
at the length and difficulties of our way,  
at the strength and number of those who are endeavoring to cast us down,  
or at anything that tends to discourage us.  
  
But we should look off from all these things, and keep our eyes steadily fixed on Jesus as our pattern, and our friend—and then our difficulties will appear as nothing; and we shall proceed cheerfully in an assured expectation of the prize! [1 Corinthians 9:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 9.26).

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. To those who have never yet begun to run—~~***

Were it optional with you whether you would have any interest in this race or not, we might leave you to your choice: but you are of necessity entered upon the lists, and must have all the shame and misery of failure, if you run not so as to obtain the prize. *The loss of Heaven is not the sole consequence of your sloth. For if you are not judged worthy of the felicity of Heaven, then you will receive the doom of the wicked and slothful servant in the torments of Hell!*Consider then how much *time*you have lost, how little may yet remain, and what an arduous race you have to run; and begin immediately, while yet the prize is in your view, and Jesus is ready to assist your feeble efforts!

***~~2. To those who are halting, or turning aside out of the course—~~***

Many "run well for a season, and yet, after all, are hindered, [Galatians 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.7)" from pressing forward to the goal. Inquire, my brethren, whence it is that such a lamentable change has taken place in you? *What is there that will compensate for the loss of the heavenly prize?*It were better far to part with every weight, and every encumbrance, whether friends, or interests, or pleasures of whatever kind, or even with life itself, than to be diverted from your course, or to be retarded in it. Be assured that, as "he who puts his hand to the plough, and looks back, is not fit for the kingdom of Heaven"—so neither can he be, who halts in his Christian race. May God enable you to resume your labors! and know for your encouragement, that, if persisted in, "they shall not be in vain in the Lord! [1 Corinthians 15:58](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.58)."

***~~3. To those who are resolutely hastening toward the goal—~~***

Doubtless you are sometimes ready to faint—but look at the cloud of witnesses that are gone before you: look at Jesus in particular, that bright example of all righteousness, and that gracious helper of all his followers. Look too at the prize, the joy that is set before you; and "have respect unto the recompense of reward," how richly will that repay you for your persevering exertions!

Methinks you are now come within a short distance of the goal, and thousands of God's dear children, though invisible to you, are looking on, and standing ready to bless your success. Press on then a little longer, "forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth unto that which is before [Philippians 3:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.13-14)." So shall you "finish your course with joy," and "receive the crown of righteousness from the hands of Jesus, your righteous Judge! [2 Timothy 4:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.7-8)."

***~~#2335~~***

***~~CHRIST'S PATIENCE UNDER SUFFERINGS~~***

***~~[Hebrews 12:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.3)~~***

"Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

*THINGS are good or evil in this life chiefly by comparison. The happiest of men in this world, are unhappy in comparison with those who are in Heaven. The most miserable of men in this world, are happy in comparison with those who are in Hell.*This reflection will be of great service to us in estimating our own state. It is not indeed expedient that we would compare ourselves with those who appear in a more prosperous condition than ourselves (unless for the purposes of humiliation and self-abasement), lest we would be led to envy them, and to repine at our own lot. But it will be highly advantageous to us frequently to view the wants and sufferings of others, in order to extirpate every murmuring thought, and to stimulate our own souls to gratitude and thanksgiving.

A sight of the Lord Jesus in particular cannot fail to produce in us the best effects; since *all that we are called to endure for his sake, is as nothing in comparison with what he patiently and willingly endured for us!*

In the text we have this very direction given us, and for this express purpose. The Apostle, in what he wrote for the comfort of the afflicted Hebrew Christians, reminds us,

***~~I. That the soul is apt to faint under heavy trials—~~***

The people of God are taught to expect trials from an ungodly world; and to make their sufferings an occasion of joy and glorying. But,

***~~Even the most eminent saints have fainted under their trials—~~***

In the Scriptures we have the weaknesses of God's people, as faithfully recorded as their virtues. And there is scarcely a saint who has not on some occasions shown himself weak as other men.

*Jacob*, in despondency, cried, "All these things are against me [Genesis 42:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 42.36)."

*Moses*, by his intemperate and hasty expressions, provoked God to exclude him from the earthly Canaan, [Numbers 20:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 20.10-12).

*Job*cursed the day of his birth, and accused even God himself of cruelty and oppression, [Job 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 3.3); [Job 10:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 10.3); [Job 16:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 16.12-14).

*David*said it was in vain to serve God; and called all who had ever testified to the contrary, by the name of liars, [Psalm 73:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.13-14); [Psalm 77:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.4); [Psalm 77:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.7-9); [Psalm 116:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 116.10-11).

*Elijah*, through the dread of Jezebel, begged of God to put an end to his life, [1 Kings 19:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 19.4).

*Jeremiah*lamented that he had ever been born; and complained that God himself was to him "as a liar, and as waters that fail, [Jeremiah 15:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 15.10); [Jeremiah 15:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 15.18)."

All of these were very distinguished characters, and yet, in circumstances of peculiar trial, they lost that composure of mind which it was their duty, and their privilege, to possess.

And who among us has not on many occasions betrayed the same weakness?

We have borne up with fortitude perhaps against some trials, which have been light and transient. But how have we sustained those trials which were heavy, complicated, and of long continuance? When our troubles have arisen from those who were our avowed enemies, we have endured them manfully. But when they have come from a quarter that we did not expect, or from a quarter from whence we had reason to expect nothing but support and consolation, how have we endured them then? If some near relative, or a friend that was as our own soul, have been the immediate cause of our affliction, and our enemies have been those of our own household—have we not given way to complaint and murmuring? Yes, have not our very spirits failed by reason of vexation, insomuch that we could find scarcely any comfort in life.

If we have not been turned from the faith, like those who were afraid to confess Christ, [John 12:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.42), have we not been diverted from the path of duty, and been led to manifest a vindictive spirit instead of overcoming evil with good? Let this then suffice to show us how weak we are, and how much we need the supports and consolations of the Gospel.

But in the text the Apostle informs us,

***~~II. That a view of Christ's patience under his sufferings will afford us most effectual relief—~~***

Many are the consolations which the Gospel administers, by pointing out to us the *author*and the *intent*of our trials, together with the *benefits*resulting from them. But there is no source of comfort so great as that which the consideration of *Christ's sufferings* opens to us.

***~~The contradiction of sinners which Christ endured was astonishing indeed—~~***

*Consider the unreasonableness with which he was opposed,* when, notwithstanding the myriads of miracles that he wrought, his enemies were continually demanding more signs, and pretending a lack of evidence as the ground of their unbelief.

*Consider the obstinacy with which he was rejected*, when his victory over the devils was ascribed to a confederacy with them; and Lazarus himself was made an object of murderous resentment, because his restoration from the grave was the means of converting some who were more open to conviction.

*Consider the malice with which he was persecuted.* Incessantly did his enemies labor to ensnare him, and seek to take away his life. And, when they had a prospect of effecting their purpose, there was no method, however infamous, which they did not use to accomplish their wishes. With what inveteracy did they suborn false witnesses; and, on the failure of that device, compel the judge by clamors and menaces, to give sentence against him!

*Consider the cruelty with which he was put to death.*They might, one would have thought, have been satisfied with seeing his back torn, and even ploughed up, with scourges. But their cruelty was insatiable; for, even when he was nailed to the accursed tree, they ceased not to mock and insult him, and to add by their indignities a tenfold poignancy to all his anguish.

Yet, notwithstanding the contradiction of sinners against him was so great and unparalleled, he endured it all with patience, never fainting, never wearied, until he expired under the accumulated load.

***~~A due consideration of Christ's sufferings will keep us from fainting under our sorrows—~~***

What are our sorrows in comparison with his? The utmost we have met with is a little contempt and ridicule, or perhaps the loss of some worldly interests or prospects. "We have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin, verse 4;" and anything short of that should be deemed unworthy of our notice. How slight are the aggravations of our sufferings in comparison with his!

If we do not deserve such treatment from man, have we not merited infinitely worse from God? But he was altogether spotless; nor could either men or devils lay anything to his charge.

Perhaps we have endeavored to do some good to those who now hate and revile us: but he came from Heaven for the salvation of those who hated him; yes, and subjected himself to the power of his enemies, on purpose that he might effect their reconciliation with God. If then he patiently endured such things for us, should we faint when called to endure some light afflictions for him? Surely we would rather rejoice that an opportunity is afforded us of testifying our love to him, and of approving ourselves faithful to his interests.

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

***~~1. For our humiliation—~~***

How should we be ashamed of our readiness to shrink from the cross, and to complain when it is laid upon us! What if we would be called to lay down our lives for Christ, as thousands have been before us? How would we endure that trial? "If we have run with the footmen and they wearied us, then how shall we contend with horses? If we are wearied in a land of peace, then how shall we do in the swelling of Jordan? [Jeremiah 12:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 12.5)." Let us remember, that "he who hates not his own life, (when it stands in competition with his duty) cannot be Christ's disciple." Let us then never fear the face of man, [Isaiah 51:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.7-8); [Isaiah 51:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.12-13); but whenever we are tempted to betray the cause of Christ, let us reflect on the example he has set for us, and "arm ourselves likewise with the same mind, [1 Peter 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.1)."

***~~2. For our encouragement—~~***

Some variation in our frames we must expect: but we must never allow a desponding thought to lodge within us. Be it so; our sufferings are very great: then we are the more conformed to the example of our blessed Lord. And shall not this thought console us? And if we walk in his steps, shall we not soon be with him where he is? Let us then be content to "fill up the measure of his sufferings," and to follow him in his appointed way. Thus shall we, like him, "be made perfect through sufferings; and, having suffered with him for a little while, be also glorified with him to all eternity! "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us! [Romans 8:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.18)"

***~~#2336~~***

***~~AFFLICTIONS, THE FRUIT OF GOD'S LOVE~~***

***~~[Hebrews 12:4-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.4-13)~~***

"In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. "Make level paths for your feet," so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed."

Persecution for righteousness' sake is what every child of God must expect: and when faith is in lively exercise, it will be sustained without murmuring. This is amply shown in the preceding chapter, [Hebrews 11:35-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.35-38). But when faith languishes, the trials which believers are called to endure will appear almost insupportable. Such was the state of many of the Hebrews to whom the Apostle wrote: they were in danger of becoming weary and faint in their minds through the greatness and long continuance of their sufferings. On this account, Paul, having shown them the power of a living faith to support them, brings before them a variety of considerations,

***~~I. For their consolation and support—~~***

The patience of Christ under his sufferings is beyond all comparison the strongest incentive to resignation under ours; since ours fall so infinitely short of his. This the Apostle first propounds for their consideration; and then goes on, in the words which we have just read, to offer other suggestions, which also are of great weight for the reconciling of the mind to trials, of whatever kind they are. From them we also, when bowed down with affliction, may learn to support them manfully, for,

***~~1. Our afflictions are far less than we have pledged ourselves willingly to endure—~~***

The very terms on which we come to Christ are, that we shall be ready to die for him at any time, and in any way, that he shall see fit. We are plainly warned by our Lord himself, that, if we will not lay down our life for him, we cannot be his disciples, "If we love our lives, we shall lose them: but, if we lose them for his sake, then shall we find them to life eternal." But, what is the loss of temporal good, when compared with that of life? Be it granted that, like the Hebrews, we have suffered much, [Hebrews 10:32-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.32-34); yet our persecutors have stopped far short of what they might have inflicted; and may, for ought we know, be yet permitted to inflict: "We have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin."

*Instead therefore of complaining of the heaviness of our trials, we have reason rather to be thankful for the lightness of them.* And, if we faint when they are so light, how shall we support them when they come upon us with unrestrained force? "If we have run with footmen and they wearied us, then how shall we contend with horses? [Jeremiah 12:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 12.5)." In our "strivings then against sin" and Satan, let us prepare for yet greater extremities: and, when we are prepared for the worst that can come upon us, then will all which stops short of that appear light and easy to be borne.

***~~2. Our afflictions are the fruits of God's paternal love—~~***

God had exhorted his people under the Old Testament dispensation to regard their trials in this view, as sent by a loving Father to his children; and to receive them with truly filial gratitude, "neither despising them," as though they came only by chance, "nor fainting under them," as though they had been sent in anger, [Proverbs 3:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.11-12).

The Apostle fixes our attention particularly on the tender and affectionate terms under which our God addresses us, "My *son*, despise not." And we would not overlook such endearing expressions, which, if duly attended to, would reconcile us even to the most afflictive dispensations. The truth is, that man is only an instrument in God's hands: and that the very afflictions which men lay upon us for our excess of piety—God lays upon us for our defects, or for the further advancement of his work within us.

Paul's thorn in the flesh was ordained of God to prevent his being too much elated by the revelations which had been given unto him, [2 Corinthians 12:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.7). Our state in this world is a state of discipline: we are yet children, and need correction on account of our manifold errors and faults. It is by correction that we are gradually brought to the exercise of true wisdom.

This is found universally among men; insomuch that there is no wise father who does not occasionally correct his child. A man, who sees children that are unconnected with him acting amiss, takes no notice of them, but leaves to others the painful office of correcting them: but his own children he corrects, because of his peculiar interest in them, and his love towards them. Would we rather that God would disregard us as bastards, that have no real relation to him? Should we not much rather be dealt with by him as his beloved children, in whose welfare he takes the deepest interest?

Whatever then be our affliction, corporeal or mental, personal or domestic; or with whatever view it may be inflicted on us by others, *let us view the hand of a loving Father in it*, and say, with Eli, "It is the Lord; let him do what seems good to him, [1 Samuel 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 3.18)." Let us "hear the rod, and him who has appointed it, [Micah 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 6.9);" and endeavor to make a just improvement of it for the good of our souls.

***~~3. If we have submitted patiently to the rebukes of our earthly parents, much more should we submit to those of our heavenly Father—~~***

Earthly parents do not always correct so justly or so temperately as they ought; their rebukes being sometimes little else than an ebullition of their own evil tempers: yet we have submitted to their corrections without presuming to arraign the wisdom, the justice, or the love that inflicted the chastisement upon us. This is a part of that honor which children were by God's law enjoined to pay those who were the fathers of their flesh; and which, if they obstinately refused to pay, they were, by God's own appointment, to be stoned to death, [Deuteronomy 21:18-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 21.18-21).

This submission is due in an infinitely higher degree to Him who is the Father of our spirits: and, if we refuse it to him, a far worse death assuredly awaits us in the world to come; for *he never inflicts any evil upon his redeemed children but for our greater good*, even that we may become in a greater degree "partakers of his holiness."

On the other hand, to obedient children there was a peculiar promise of a long and happy life; a promise doubtless fulfilled to multitudes in former times, and frequently accomplished now. But to those who meekly submit to the Divine chastisements, it shall be fulfilled in the Canaan that is above, even in the regions of blessedness and glory for evermore. Shall we then refuse to the corrections of our heavenly Father, that submission which we paid to our earthly parents? "Shall we not much rather be in subjection to him, and live?" Surely this is our truest wisdom, and our highest privilege.

***~~4. Our sufferings, however grievous they may appear at the time, are all sent for our eternal good—~~***

While we have the feelings of humanity, chastening, of whatever kind it be, cannot but be grievous to us at the time. But after it has produced its proper effects, "it yields the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby." At first, tribulation works impatience: but, when the soul has been well disciplined by a continuance or recurrence of it, a better temper is produced; and, through the sanctifying operations of the Holy Spirit upon the soul, a different process is produced; and "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)."

Shall we complain of dispensations which are sent for such an end? Shall the *vine*complain of the pruning knife, which cuts only with a view to increase its fruitfulness? Shall the vessel complain of the furnace into which it is put in order to effect its fitness for the Master's use? Let us then look to the end; and we shall never repine at the means which Infinite Wisdom has ordained for the attainment of it.

If we are "in heaviness through manifold temptations, let us not forget that there is a fit occasion for them; and that the trial of our faith, which is infinitely more precious than that which purifies the gold, will be found to the praise and honor and glory of our God, and to our own also, at the appearing of Jesus Christ! [1 Peter 1:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.6-7)." If we are "made partakers of his holiness," we shall never complain of the means which were used to bring us to the attainment of it.

***~~5. Walk so as to encourage others by your example—~~***

The influence of example is far greater than we are ready to imagine. Peter, in order to avoid the displeasure of the Judaizing Christians, had recourse to dissimulation. (Here I may observe that if an Apostle swerved so grievously from the path of duty, through his carnal reasonings, who has not reason to take heed lest he also fall?) And what was the effect which this had this on others? "The whole Church dissembled with him; insomuch that even Barnabas himself was carried away with their dissimulation, [Galatians 2:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.13-14)."

On the other hand, see the effect of good example in the Apostle Paul. He was imprisoned for the truth's sake, and retained his fidelity undaunted, and undiminished; insomuch that "his bonds for Christ's sake became a matter of notoriety through Caesar's palace, and in all other places. And what was the effect of this? We are told, that "many of the brethren in the Lord waxing confident by his bonds," and by what they heard of his fortitude in supporting them, "were much more bold to speak the word without fear," so that "the Gospel was furthered" by the very means which its enemies used to obstruct its progress, [Philippians 1:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.12-14).

Similar effects will, in a greater or less degree, follow from our conduct under our afflictions. There are in every place many who may be considered as "lame," who will be stumbled and weakened, and discouraged, if they see us faint. While, on the other hand, they will be encouraged and emboldened to go forward, if they behold us adhering resolutely to the path of duty, and supporting manfully the trials which are come upon us. Let us then think of the probable effect of our conduct upon those around us. Let us think how much good or evil we may do, according as we approve ourselves to God, or not, in the discharge of our duty. There is a high mark which we would pursue, even that which the Apostle prayed for in behalf of the Colossians, to be "strengthened with all might, according to God's glorious power, unto all patience, and long-suffering, with joyfulness—giving thanks unto the Father who has made us fit to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, [Colossians 1:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.11-12)."

Do not think that such an aim as this would betray any arrogance in you: for Timothy was but a youth, and yet was directed to be an example, not to the world only, but to believers also, in everything that was good, [1 Timothy 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 4.12); and it is the duty of every one, whether a minister or not, "so to let his light shine before men, that all who behold it may be led to glorify their Father who is in Heaven, [Matthew 5:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.16)." In a word, let us all endeavor so to walk, that we may say with the Apostle Paul, "Whatever you have heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace shall be with you! [Colossians 4:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 4.9)."

The Apostle having instructed the Hebrews in the true nature and end of their sufferings, suggests some further considerations,

***~~II. For their direction and guidance—~~***

These also we shall consider as addressed to us; and in correspondence with them we would say to all sufferers of the present day,

***~~1. Yield not to dejection—~~***

Troubles, whether felt or feared, are apt to depress the spirits, and to enervate the whole man. This we see depicted in strong colors in the Prophet Ezekiel. "Sigh," says God to him, "Sigh, O son of man, with the breaking of your loins, and with bitterness sigh before their eyes. And it shall be, when they say unto you, Why do you sigh? that you shall answer, For the tidings: because it comes: and every heart shall melt, and all hands shall be feeble, and every spirit shall faint, and all knees shall be weak as water [Ezekiel 21:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 21.7)."

But it should not be thus with us, whatever be the trials with which we have been visited, or with which we may be menaced: for they all are ordered by a wise and gracious God, who controls and limits all according to his own sovereign will, and without whose permission not a hair of our head can be touched. Our enemies, unconscious of their dependence on him, plot and threaten our destruction. But see what the Psalmist says concerning them: "The wicked plots against the just, and gnashes upon him with his teeth: but the Lord shall laugh at him! [Psalm 37:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 37.12-13)," as a poor, impotent, and malignant worm, that exists only through his forbearance and tender mercy!

Now, I ask, shall God laugh at him, and we cry? Shall we not rather set the poor impotent worm at defiance? But see what the Psalmist further adds: "The wicked have drawn out the sword, and have bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy, and to slay such as be of upright conduct." And what is the outcome of all this? "Their sword shall enter into their own heart, and their bows shall be broken, [Psalm 37:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 37.14-15)." "Say not then, A confederacy, like those who are crying out, A confederacy; neither fear their fear, nor be afraid: but sanctify the Lord Almighty himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread: and he shall be to you for a sanctuary, [Isaiah 8:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.12-14)."

And when others would alarm you with the supposed power of your persecutors, let your answer be, "The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord's throne is in Heaven! [Psalm 11:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 11.1-4)."

The greatest of all your adversaries, even Satan himself, could not so much as enter into the swine without permission: how then shall he, or any of his confederates, hurt a child of God without God's permission [1 Peter 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.13). You may laugh them all to scorn, and shake your head at them, [Isaiah 37:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 37.22); for, with God on your side, there are a million times "more for you than against you." Only "be strong in the Lord, [Ephesians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.10)," and you will be more than conqueror over all.

***~~2. Swerve not from the path of duty—~~***

Fear, and unbelief, and impatience "will make our ways crooked, [Isaiah 59:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 59.8);" and the contrivances to which under their influence we shall have recourse for the purpose of avoiding difficulties, will augment our difficulties a hundred-fold. The way to "make straight paths for our feet," is simply to fulfill the will of God, and leave outcomes to him.

If Daniel and the Hebrew Youths had set themselves to consider how they might avoid the trials with which they were threatened, they might have attained their end, it is true; but they would have involved their souls in the deepest guilt. They followed the straight-forward path: not moving to the right hand nor to the left, to avoid the fiery furnace, or a den of lions. This was right: And this is the very direction given to us also by God himself: "Ponder the path of your feet; and let all your ways be established: Turn not to the right hand, nor to the left; remove your feet from evil, [Proverbs 4:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 4.26-27)."

Adopt this then as the principle from which no consideration under Heaven shall induce you to depart, "I must obey my God;" and, if the whole world combines to divert you from it, let your reply be, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge you."

This will deliver you from endless perplexity. This will make your every path both clear and straight. "If your eye is evil," and the film of carnal hopes or fears be upon it, then "your whole body will be full of darkness:" but "if your eye be single," and you have no purpose but to serve and honor God, then "your whole body will be full of light [Matthew 6:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.22-23)," and your steps will be directed in a way wherein you shall neither err, nor stumble.

***~~#2337~~***

***~~THE NECESSITY OF HOLINESS~~***

***~~[Hebrews 12:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.14)~~***

"Follow after holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."

THE Gospel, while it brings us into a state of reconciliation with God, enjoins us to maintain peace with man. This is rendered difficult, not only by the evil dispositions that are exercised on account of daily occurrences, but more especially by the enmity which exists in the hearts of the generality with respect to religion; in reference to which our Lord himself said, "I come not to send peace on earth, but a sword." Much however may be done by means of patience, meekness, and forbearance; and*it is our duty to sacrifice anything, except truth and a good conscience, for the sake of peace*.

But our duty to God is paramount to every other consideration: therefore the Apostle, exhorting the Hebrews to "follow peace with all men," adds immediately, "and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:" the import of which is, that we may fail in obtaining peace, however earnestly we may seek it; but *holiness we may, and must, attain at the peril of our souls; for without it no man shall see the Lord.*

We shall,

***~~I. Ascertain the nature of holiness—~~***

*Holiness is a conformity of heart and life to the revealed will of God.* But, to enter more fully into the subject, it implies,

***~~1. That we love the whole will of God as revealed in his word—~~***

*There is nothing that more truly characterizes a Christian than this: it draws a line of distinction between him and all other persons upon earth.* The self-righteous Pharisee, and the most refined hypocrite, have secret objections against the law of God; they think its *precepts*too strict, and its *sanctions*too severe. They would be glad if it left them somewhat greater latitude. They would be content that it would forbid gross outward sins, and insist on the performance of outward duties: but that it would call for continual self-denial, that it would require brokenness of heart and contrition for the most secret offenses, and demand the utmost exertion of all our faculties in the service of our God, this appears too much; they would wish for an easier way to Heaven.

But a person who possesses the smallest measure of true holiness, is the very reverse of this. He loathes himself for not complying more perfectly with the demands of the law; but he never condemns the law as too strict; he would not have it require one jot or tittle less than it does. He even admires and loves it for its purity; he says with David, "The commandment of the Lord is pure, therefore your servant loves it." He acknowledges it to be not only "holy, and just—but good" also, and calculated to make every one happy that obeys it. And though he cannot obey it perfectly, he can truly say, "I delight in the law of God after my inward man!" Yes, the language of his heart is, "O that my ways were made so direct, that I might keep your statutes."

***~~2. That we live in no allowed deviation from the will of God as revealed in his word—~~***

We mean not to say, that a Christian experiences no deviations from the law of God; (for, alas! he is conscious of many) but he does not allow them. Others will obey the will of God as far as will consist with their interests and reputation; or with the exception of some bosom sin; but there will always be found, in insincere persons, some *secret lust*for which they plead, and in reference to which they say, "Pardon your servant in this thing."

But true holiness admits of no reserves, no limitations, no exceptions: and he who possesses it will stop short of nothing that God has commanded. He may do what is wrong, either through ignorance or temptation; but he will not *persist*in it: he will endeavor to mortify the whole body of sin. He will no more allow himself in secret sins, whether of omission or of commission, than he will commit the greatest enormities. Like David he says, "I esteem your commandments concerning all things to be right; therefore I hate every false way;" that is, I love the ways of duty, so that I would walk in them even if there were no reward; and I hate the ways of sin, so that I would shun them, though I were sure never to incur punishment.

***~~3. That we actually grow in a conformity to the will of God as revealed in his word—~~***

Sanctification is a progressive work. A child of God arrives not at full stature but by degrees: he is constantly growing in grace: the spring bloom gradually advances to the autumnal fruit. There may indeed be seasons wherein he may appear to decline, or may really suffer a declension: but if he have the grace of God in his heart, he will revive, and return to God with more fervor and steadfastness. Nor will he ever think he has already attained, or is already perfect; but "forgetting the things that are behind, he will reach forward unto that which is ahead."

This is in no respect the case with others. They are satisfied with their present state: they are not conscious of their defects; and therefore they feel no longings for higher attainments. They don't grow, but are like a painted picture upon the canvass; while the true Christian "*grows*up into Christ in all things as his living head," and, like the sun in the firmament, "shines brighter and brighter unto the perfect day."

Having in this description of holiness, marked the lowest degree of it that exists in a true Christian, we proceed to,

***~~II. Show the grounds on which holiness is necessary in order to salvation—~~***

If we were not able to assign any reason for God's determination, it would be quite sufficient for us to know, that he has issued his decree. It is not for us to dispute, but to submit, saying, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right!"

But there is one obvious ground on which the necessity of holiness is indisputable, namely, *that in the very nature of things it is impossible without holiness to enjoy the Divine presence.*

If Heaven were a place suited to a carnal mind, and afforded the gratifications which unregenerate men desire, then indeed unholy men might find such happiness there, as in their state they are capable of receiving. But Heaven is a holy *place*; the habitation of a holy *God*: it is filled with myriads of holy *men*and angels, who are exercising themselves incessantly in the holy *employments*of praise and adoration. What then would there be in that place suited to the taste of an unholy man?

Could those whose hearts were defiled with sin, and who had never been purged from its guilt by the atoning blood of Christ, find pleasure in the presence of God, who, being omniscient, could not but discern their state, and, being holy, could not but regard them with abhorrence? Would not a consciousness of his holiness and power terrify them, and a recollection that he had once cast innumerable angels out of Heaven, appal them? Could they delight in the society of the glorified saints whom they so little resemble, or find communion with them in exercises, which were here their burden and aversion?

We are fully assured, that "as the tree falls, so it lies;" that "he who is unjust, will be unjust still, and he who is filthy, will be filthy still." If it has not been the one desire of our hearts to honor and enjoy God; if secret fellowship with him in our chambers, and social fellowship with him in the public assembly, have been a mere task, and not the delight of our souls—then how can we suppose that we would instantly find a delight in these things in Heaven? *How could we endure to spend an eternity there in employments which we loath?* We are told, that there is a "fitness for the inheritance of the saints, [Colossians 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.12);" and that we must have that fitness before we could enjoy the Divine presence, if we were admitted into it.

Christ must be precious to us now, if we would find him so in the eternal world: and we must account it our supreme felicity to enjoy him now, if we would hereafter join the chorus of saints and angels, in ascribing "Salvation to God and to the Lamb for ever."

In short, holiness, real holiness of heart, is as necessary to the enjoyment of the Divine presence, as a taste for music, or literature, is for the company and employments of musical or literary men.

As we soon grow weary of things which we do not desire, and prefer any other employment that is more suited to our inclination and capacity, so most assuredly must it be in Heaven, if our natures be not changed: we shall remain for ever destitute of those qualities which constitute our fitness for the heavenly inheritance, and consequently be for ever incapable of participating in the joys of Heaven.

This may at least be sufficient to illustrate the declaration in the text; perhaps we may add also, to vindicate it. Not that any declaration of God is to be judged of by the reasons which fallible men may assign in vindication of it: his word is the same, whether we believe it or not; nor shall one jot or tittle of it ever fail.

***~~This subject cannot but suggest to our minds the following reflections:~~***

***~~1. How few are there that will eventually be saved!~~***

Take the foregoing explanation of holiness, and compare it with the state of all around us; how awful the contrast! But God is true; and his word respecting the unholy shall surely stand. Let us "seek then, yes, strive to enter in at the strait gate, and to walk in the narrow path." Let us "follow" holiness with all our might: Whatever we may think, it is in that way alone that we can behold the face of God in peace.

***~~2. How needful is it that we should seek holiness in a right way!~~***

The generality are extremely ignorant respecting the manner in which holiness is to be obtained: they have an idea that they must acquire it by some exertions of their own: whereas they should seek it from Christ, through the operation of his Spirit in their hearts. They should first seek to be united to him by faith, as scions to the stock of a tree, or as a wife to her husband. These are the very means prescribed by our Lord, [John 15:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.4-5) and by Paul, [Romans 7:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.4); then, by virtue derived from him, they will be made fruitful in good works, and be "changed into his image in righteousness, and true holiness."

***~~#2338~~***

***~~THE DANGER OF DESPISING OR DISHONORING THE GOSPEL~~***

**[Hebrews 12:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.15-17)**

"See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears."

The riches of the Gospel are unsearchable, and freely imparted to all who seek them by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet they quite mistake the nature of the Gospel, who imagine it to be inconsistent with solemn warnings. It offers everything freely; but it does not dispense with the exertion of human efforts. It promises everything fully; but not in such a way as to supersede the need of care and watchfulness on our part. In fact, it abounds with warnings and exhortations, to which we must take the utmost heed; and by attending to which we are to secure the blessings which it holds out to us.

Nothing can be conceived more consolatory than all the foregoing declarations, that sufferings of whatever kind, and especially those inflicted on us for righteousness' sake, are permitted by our heavenly Father for our good, and shall be overruled by him for the advancement of our best interests. At the same time we are warned, that "without holiness, radical and universal holiness, no man shall see the Lord." And we are cautioned to "look diligently," lest, by coming short of the requirements of the Gospel, we fail to attain a possession of its blessings.

The caution here given us is two-fold:

***~~I. Not to come short of the Gospel in embracing it—~~***

By "the grace of God" I understand "the Gospel of the grace of God," or that "grace of God which brings salvation." And by "missing the grace of God," I understand, a falling short of it: the first part of our text being exactly parallel with that expression in the fourth chapter of this epistle, "Let us fear lest, a promise being left to us of entering into his rest, any of you would seem to come short of it, [Hebrews 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.1)." Now we may come short of the Gospel:

***~~1. By not submitting to its humiliating doctrines—~~***

The Gospel views all men as in a lost and perishing condition. Its provisions are made for all mankind without exception. It knows nothing of persons so good as not to need salvation, or of persons so bad as to be beyond the reach of the salvation which it provides. It requires all to view themselves as "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked; and counsels them to come to the Lord Jesus Christ for eye-salve that they may *see*; for gold that they may be *enriched*; and for garments that they may be *clothed*, [Revelation 3:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.17-18)." It allows none to bring any price in their hands, but requires them to receive everything "without money and without price [Isaiah 55:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.1)."

Nor does it merely require this of men at their first conversion: it prescribes the same humiliating system to the last hour of our lives. Whatever our attainments are, we must renounce them all in point of dependence, and place our whole dependence on the Lord "Jesus Christ for wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."

We must have no more in ourselves than the branch of a vine has; but must receive everything from the stem into which we have been engrafted, [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.5). We must "receive everything out of the fullness that is in Christ, [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16)," and must "live altogether 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)."

But all this is very humiliating. Proud man does not like to be brought so low, as to depend wholly on another, and not at all on himself. We wish to have something of our own whereof we may boast. And to be reduced to a level with the vilest of the human race, so as to acknowledge ourselves as much indebted to Divine grace as they, is a humiliation to which we cannot endure to submit. Could we be saved in a way more congenial with our own feelings, we would be satisfied: but when it is said, "Wash and be clean," instead of accepting the tidings with gratitude, we spurn at them like Naaman, and go away in a rage! 2 Kings 5:10-13.

To this however we must "submit, [Romans 10:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.3);" for there is no other way of salvation for any man, [Acts 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.12). [1 Corinthians 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.11); and, if we will not come to Christ upon his own terms, we must remain for ever destitute of the blessings he has purchased for us, [Romans 9:30-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.30-32).

***~~2. By not obeying its self-denying doctrines—~~***

Though the Gospel gives salvation freely, it does not leave us at liberty to neglect good works. On the contrary, "it teaches us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world." Indeed, the sanctification it requires of us is as offensive to our carnal and worldly hearts, as the humiliation it imposes on us is to our pride. *The object of the Gospel is not merely to save men from death and Hell, but to bring them back to a state of holy allegiance to their God*, such as Adam experienced in Paradise. For this end it requires us to give up ourselves as living sacrifices unto God, and to be as entirely dedicated to his service as the burned-offerings were, which were wholly consumed on the altar, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1). It enjoins us "neither to live unto ourselves, nor die unto ourselves;" but both in life and death to be altogether at the Lord's disposal, for the accomplishment of his will, and for the promotion of his glory, [Romans 14:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.7-8).

Now to this measure of holiness we have by nature a deep and rooted aversion. We have many earthly and sensual appetites, which plead for indulgence: and when we are required to "cut off the right hand, and pluck out the right eye," and to "be holy as God himself is holy," we reply, "This is a hard saying, who can bear it?" To "mortify our members upon earth," and to "crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts," is a work, which, as the very terms in which it is expressed intimate, is painful to flesh and blood: and to be told that without this we never can be Christ's disciples, is most grating to our ears! [Galatians 5:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.24). But nothing less than this will suffice for the approving of ourselves upright in the sight of God.

I beseech you then, brethren, to "look diligently" to this matter, and not to come short of what the Gospel requires of you; for*if you do not comply with both its doctrines and its precepts, you can never partake of its privileges and its blessings.*

But respecting this Gospel, we are further cautioned,

***~~II. Not to dishonor it after we have embraced it—~~***

We are in danger of dishonoring it:

***~~1. By heretical opinions—~~***

It is to these chiefly, though not exclusively, that I suppose "the root of bitterness" to refer. The expression is adopted from the Old Testament, where Moses cautions the Israelites against any "root among them bearing gall and wormwood," and operating to the production of idolatry, [Deuteronomy 29:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 29.19). Such sprang up very early in the Christian Church; even as Paul forewarned the elders of Ephesus to expect: "I know this, that after my departure shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them, [Acts 20:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.29-30)." Some there were who blended the Mosaic rites with the Gospel; others, who "denied the resurrection, saying that it was past already;" others "denied the Lord who bought them:" and great was "the trouble," and extensive the defilement, which these heretics occasioned in the Church of Christ, [Galatians 5:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.7-10). [2 Timothy 2:10-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.10-18). [2 Peter 2:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.1-2).

Such teachers there have been ever since in the Church, even to the present hour: and there is need of the utmost care that we be not drawn aside by any of them "from the simplicity that is in Christ, [2 Corinthians 11:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.3)." Nothing can be more simple than the Gospel, when it is received in a humble child-like spirit. It requires nothing but a life of *faith*in the Lord Jesus Christ, and a life of *love*both towards God and man for his sake. The whole is comprehended in those words, "faith working by love."

But men are fond of making the Gospel a theater for disputation; and they care not how far they divert the minds of their followers from "the truth as it is in Jesus," if only they may but prevail upon them to receive their dogmas. This is the true root of all the heresies which have distracted and defiled the Church of God in all ages.

But be on your guard, brethren, lest any such "root of bitterness" spring up among you. It is well called "a root of bitterness," for *nothing that ever yet divided the human race has caused more "bitterness" than that which calls itself religion*, but which, in fact, is only some partial or erroneous view of religion, which conceit has propagated, and bigotry enforced.

***~~2. By ungodly practices—~~***

Grievous have been the falls of many who have professed religion; and shocking have been the scandals which have at times prevailed in the Christian Church. Evils, which prevailed among the ignorant and licentious Gentiles, were indulged, and vindicated, by them after they had embraced the Gospel of Christ; and many, like profane Esau, bartered away the inheritance of Heaven for some worthless perishable good.

Thus it is at this day. Many things are pleaded for, which are as opposite to the holy nature of the Gospel as "fornication" itself: and *the vanities of time are yet daily exchanged for the glories of eternity*. In vain are we reminded how bitterly Esau at last bewailed his error; or how fruitless were his efforts to remedy the evil he had committed. We see nothing in his example which speaks to us; nor have we any ears for the instruction it conveys to us. *The influence of temptation is too strong for us: our earthly and sensual hearts will plead for gratifications which the Gospel of Christ does not allow: and thus multitudes relinquish all the blessings of eternity, through their undue attachment to the things of time and sense.*

But let not such be found among you. It is melancholy to see that *Demas*, after being twice united with Luke in the salutations of Paul, would be found, "through love to this present world," "making shipwreck of the faith and of a good conscience." But such instances occur in every age of the Church: and it requires continual watchfulness over our own hearts, and over each other also, to prevent the more frequent recurrence of similar apostasy. To all then I would recommend the example of Paul, who "kept his body under, and brought it into subjection, lest, after having preached to others, he himself would become a cast-away, [1 Corinthians 9:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 9.27)."

***~~The solemn hint with which our text concludes, will furnish us with matter suited to enforce the preceding subject—~~***

***~~1. Think what will before long be your views of your present conduct, if you neglect the cautions which have been now suggested—~~***

Lightly as Esau once thought of his birthright, he saw at last that it was worthy to be "sought," yes, to be "sought carefully" too, and that "with tears." And what will be your views of Heaven when you are lying on a bed of sickness, or, at all events, the very instant that your soul enters upon the invisible world? Will an obedience to the Gospel then appear so hard a condition, that all the glory of Heaven could not recompense you for complying with it; or the mortification of some forbidden lust so insupportable a task, that Hell itself, with the indulgence of that lust, was a better portion than Heaven with the mortification of it? No! the pangs of Esau will be your pangs, when you find how bitter are the consequences of your folly, and how irreversible the doom that has been pronounced!

Not that repentance, provided it had been genuine, would have been unavailing for Esau as far as related to his eternal state. Isaac had, though unwittingly, conferred the rights of primogeniture on Jacob; and he would not reverse his word, notwithstanding all the bitter cries with which Esau importuned him to do so. And this is what is meant, when it is said, that Esau "found no place for repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears."

Had he repented before God, he might have obtained pardon with God: as we also may do, through our Lord Jesus Christ. But, *if we do not turn to God through Christ with our whole hearts, we shall find before long the door of mercy shut against us, and in vain implore admission to that bliss which now we have despised!*[Luke 13:24-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 13.24-27).

***~~2. Yield to the Gospel, without delay, the obedience which it requires—~~***

Infinite are the blessings which it offers to us. And what are the sacrifices which we are called to make? Be they ever so difficult or self-denying, they are not worth a thought in comparison with "the grace that shall be brought unto us at the revelation of Jesus Christ." The wise merchantman parted with all for the pearl of great price. You do the same: and determine through grace, that whatever it may cost, you will not come short of it by refusing to make the sacrifices, or suffer either men or devils to rob you of it!

***~~#2339~~***

***~~THE TRANSCENDENT EXCELLENCE OF THE CHRISTIAN DISPENSATION~~***

***~~[Hebrews 12:18-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.18-25)~~***

"You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned." The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear." But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in Heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from Heaven."

IN explaining the Holy Scriptures, it is often requisite that we carefully bear in mind, not only the immediate context, but the whole scope of the book in which any particular passage occurs. This is of the first importance in considering several expressions in the Epistle of James, and it is important in the passage before us.

The general scope of the Epistle to the Hebrews, is to encourage the Jewish Christians to hold fast their profession in the midst of all the persecutions they endured. And the principal argument used for their encouragement is, the great superiority of the Christian religion above that which they had renounced. In the foregoing part of the epistle, this subject is treated at large: and, in the words which we have read, there is a kind of recapitulation of it, purposely introduced, in order to confirm the Hebrews in a steady adherence to the faith which they had embraced, and to show them the dreadful danger of departing from it.

Hence, in elucidating this passage, we shall have occasion to show,

***~~I. The transcendent excellence of the Christian dispensation—~~***

The circumstances which took place at the giving of the law, are all particularly and distinctly referred to, compare verses 18-21 with [Exodus 19:14-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 19.14-25); and they exhibit in very striking characters the nature of the law itself. The law was never given in order that the people might rest in it, or expect life from it; but that they might be made to know and feel their need of that better covenant which God would make with them under the Gospel dispensation. Instead of bringing men to God, it kept them at the greatest distance from him, not a soul being allowed to touch the mount on which he revealed himself, nor so much as a beast touching it without having instant death inflicted on him. Instead of producing anything like filial love and confidence, it inspired only fear and terror, and, as the Apostle says, "tended to bondage, [Galatians 4:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.24)." Even Moses himself said, "I exceedingly fear and quake." Instead of offering life to any one, it was altogether "a ministry of condemnation and death, [2 Corinthians 3:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.7); [2 Corinthians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.9)."

Now, says the Apostle, you who have received the Gospel are not come to such a dispensation as that, "you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, [Romans 8:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.15);" but you have come,

***~~1. To a better place—~~***

Mount Sinai differed not from any other mount: it might be seen and touched like any other place. But not so the mount to which those who believe in Christ are come: "they have come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem," a place not visible to mortal eyes, nor like to any place which mortal hands have formed: it is a place formed by Almighty God for his own immediate residence, and for the fullest manifestations of his glory.

***~~2. To a nobler society—~~***

Angels indeed were present at the giving of the law: but the Jews had no communion with them: they were only God's agents for augmenting the terror of the scene, [Acts 7:53](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.53) with [Psalm 68:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 68.17). Their whole tribes were there convened: but it was only that they might all be filled with the same dread of God's wrath, and be made to unite in that urgent request, that God would speak to them no more by an audible voice, but only through Moses as a mediator, [Deuteronomy 5:22-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 5.22-28).

But those who believe in Christ "have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in Heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a New Covenant." Yes, the glorified saints and angels all belong to the same blessed assembly to which believers are now called: and "God, even as a Judge," is no longer to them an object of dread, because they know that he at the same time is their Father: and they have "Jesus as their Mediator" with him; and "the New Covenant" as the rule according to which they shall be dealt with by him. Here all is no longer fear and terror, but peace and joy.

***~~3. To far more exalted privileges—~~***

Moses, the morning after the giving of the law, offered burned-offerings; with the blood of which he sprinkled both the book of the covenant which had been made with the people, and the people themselves, saying, "Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you concerning all these words, [Exodus 24:4-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 24.4-8)." But what did this covenant avail them? The very blood with which it was ratified served only to testify against them as violating their own engagements, and making void every promise contained in it.

But the blood of sprinkling to which the Christian is come, effectually removes from him all his sin, and prevails for his perfect reconciliation with God.

The blood which Abel offered in sacrifice, received a visible and most honorable token of God's acceptance of it, [Hebrews 11:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.4); but, however blessed that external testimony was, it was not worthy to be compared with that internal "witness of the Spirit," with which believers in Christ are sealed; which assures them of their adoption into God's family, and their everlasting fruition of his glory: it seals them, not for a time only, but unto the day of redemption; and is to them, not a seal only, but a pledge and foretaste of Heaven itself! [Ephesians 1:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.13-14). The very same eternal love which "elects them to obedience," elects them also to this "sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ, [1 Peter 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.2)."

The Apostle, however, not content with exhibiting thus the transcendent excellence of Christianity, proceeds to point out,

***~~II. The indispensable necessity of paying to the Christian dispensation the attention it requires—~~***

The warning which he gives to the Hebrews is most solemn, "See that you refuse not him who speaks:" and the argument with which he enforces it is most awful, "for, if they escaped not who refused him who spoke on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him who speaks from Heaven."

***~~Hear then the warning—~~***

Look into the history of the Hebrews: see what became of those who refused obedience to the Sinai covenant: they perished; even that whole nation perished, (of those at least who had attained the age of full maturity,) with the exception of two. For one single transgression of it, was Moses himself excluded from the earthly Canaan, [Deuteronomy 32:50-51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.50-51). The extreme severity of the law against any willful and presumptuous violation of its commands, is again and again held forth as a warning to us under the Gospel dispensation, and particularly in the epistle before us: "If the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation? [Hebrews 2:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.2-3)." So again, "He who despised Moses' law died without mercy, under two or three witnesses: of how much more severe punishment, suppose you, shall he be thought worthy, who has trodden under foot the Son of God, and has counted the blood of the covenant with which he was sanctified an unholy thing, and has done despite to the Spirit of grace? [Hebrews 10:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.28-29)." Well may such warnings as these sink down into our ears, and make us tremble at the thought of disobedience to the Gospel covenant!

***~~Acknowledge also the justice of it—~~***

Think how the Christian covenant has been delivered: not by a terrific voice, uttered from a cloud by a Being that was invisible, but by the Lord Jesus Christ himself descending from the highest heavens to make it known to us in the mild accents of love and mercy.

Think too of its contents. To what does it call us, but to a conformity with the holy angels, and the spirits of the just made perfect? It brings us into favor with God, precisely as they are. It invites us to begin their employments now, and even on earth to participate in their bliss. It makes every provision for the end: it offers pardon, and peace, and righteousness, and glory—to all who by faith will lay hold upon it. Say then, what do not they deserve who refuse to listen to invitations like these? Truly, we cannot but acknowledge, that, if the judgments denounced against the disobedient Israelites were just, much more must the heaviest judgments that can ever be inflicted upon us be just, if we refuse to listen to Him who speaks to us with such astonishing condescension and grace.

We must not omit to notice, that the Apostle here takes for granted, respecting every true Christian, that he is thus come to Mount Zion.

***~~Permit me then, in conclusion,~~***

***~~1. To make this a matter of inquiry—~~***

Have you indeed come thus to Mount Zion? Have you turned your backs on Mount Sinai, from a deep conviction that you are condemned by the law, and have no hope at all but from the gracious provisions of the Gospel? Have you obtained an insight into the nature of true religion, as consisting in a communion with God and with the heavenly hosts, and an actual participation of the mind, the spirit, the blessedness of Heaven? Ah! how rarely is Christianity viewed in this light! It is regarded rather as a mere system of restraints enforced with terror, than as a pledge and foretaste of the heavenly bliss! I beg you, not to imagine that you have ever yet set out aright, if you have not thus passed from Mount Sinai unto Zion, and from Moses unto Christ!

***~~2. To address you under the supposition which is here made—~~***

I will suppose, that "you have come unto Mount Zion." Yet much would I guard you, as the Apostle did the Hebrews, against yielding to any species of temptation that may deprive you of the blessings to which, according to your Christian profession, you are entitled. It is no uncommon thing for persons to make shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience, even after they have for some time maintained, in appearance at least, an upright walk and conduct. But beware lest you be in any way hindered in running the race that is set before you: difficulties you must meet with, both within and without: and it is well that you do meet with them; for how else shall your fidelity to God be tried?

But ask yourselves, what any of the holy angels would do if they were in your place? Or what any of the spirits of the just that are now made perfect would reply to those who would either by menaces or allurements attempt to turn them from God? You cannot doubt. Be then like them, to whose society you are brought, and with whom you are to dwell through everlasting ages: and as you are already come to the very gate of Heaven, see that "an entrance into it is ministered unto you abundantly through Jesus Christ our Lord."

***~~#2340~~***

***~~ABEL'S SACRIFICE AND CHRIST'S COMPARED~~***

***~~[Hebrews 12:22-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.22-24)~~***

"But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel."

AS the Christian dispensation differs widely from that of Moses as to the manner in which it was promulgated, so does it most essentially differ with respect to the spirit and temper which it is calculated to produce in the minds of men. The terrors of Mount Sinai were suited to impress the Jews with a servile fear; as their whole system of rites and ceremonies was to keep them under bondage. But the mild genius of the Gospel introduces us at once to peace and liberty. In the passage before us the Apostle exemplifies this remark in many particulars; the last of which demands our attention at this time. We propose to show,

***~~I. The efficacy of Abel's blood—~~***

***~~By "the blood of Abel" we are not to understand his own blood, but the blood of his sacrifice—~~***

The generality of commentators indeed explain this as relating to Abel's blood, which cried for vengeance against his murderous brother, [Genesis 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 4.10). But to commend the blood of Christ in this view, would indeed be no commendation at all. The history of Abel informs us, that he offered one of the firstlings of his flock in addition to the same kind of offering as Cain brought. This is well proved by Dr. Kennicott, in his dissertation on Cain and Abel, manifesting thereby not merely his obligations to God as a creature, but his conscious guilt as a sinner, and his faith in that Lamb of God, who was to take away the sin of the world, [Hebrews 11:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.4). That sacrifice of his was honored with very peculiar tokens of God's acceptance Perhaps fire might be sent from Heaven to consume the sacrifice. See instances of this, [Leviticus 9:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 9.24). [1 Kings 18:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 18.38). [1 Chronicles 21:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 21.26) and [2 Chronicles 7:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 7.1); and may therefore fitly be referred to as illustrative of the sacrifice of Christ.

***~~It spoke to him who offered it very excellent things—~~***

Had not the marks of God's favor been such as were most desirable, Cain would not have so cruelly envied his brother for the attainment of them. But they manifestly declared to Abel the acceptance of his person, and an approbation of his service. What could be more delightful than such a testimony to a pious soul? Had life itself been the price of such a blessing, it had been well bestowed.

But the excellence of Abel's sacrifice is far surpassed by,

***~~II. The superior efficacy of Christ's sacrifice—~~***

***~~The blood of Christ is here, as in other places, [1 Peter 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.2), called "the blood of sprinkling"—~~***

There is in this place an allusion to the sprinkling of blood on the book and on the people, when God made his covenant with the Jewish nation. Compare [Exodus 24:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 24.6-8) with [Hebrews 9:18-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.18-22). The blood of Christ is sprinkled upon us, when we enter into covenant with God; and it binds God, if we may so say, to fulfill to us his promises, while it binds us on the other hand to obey his precepts.

***~~Christ's sacrifice speaks to us incomparably better things than the blood of Abel—~~***

Great as the expressions of God's love to Abel were in consequence of the sacrifice which that righteous man had offered, they were not to be compared with those which we receive through Christ. There was no inherent virtue in his sacrifice; its efficacy was derived from the relation it bore to Christ; and the blessings enjoyed by means of it, were rather typical than real. The continuance of God's favor to him was to be secured only by a constant repetition of the same sacrifices; nor could he obtain a full and perfect peace of conscience even by their means, [Hebrews 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.9); but Christ, by his one sacrifice of himself, has perfected forever those who are sanctified [Hebrews 10:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.14). Besides, whatever Abel's sacrifice spoke, it spoke to him alone: whereas the blood of Christ speaks to the whole world, and proclaims acceptance to all who will trust in it for salvation. Thus, while the good things which the blood of Abel spoke, were only typical, temporary, and personal; those which the blood of Christ speaks, are real, permanent, and universal.

Nor will our concern in this matter appear unimportant, if we consider,

***~~III. The interest which the believer has in Christ's sacrifice—~~***

***~~Every believer "comes to" this blood of sprinkling—~~***

The efficacy of the Redeemer's blood is not a matter of speculation, but of experience, to every true Christian.

As Moses and the Israelites "came to" Mount Sinai in order to make a covenant with God, so do we come to the blood of sprinkling.

They came as persons redeemed by God out of the house of bondage. We come as redeemed from death and Hell.

They came to take God as their God, and to give up themselves to him as his people. We come with precisely the same view.

They offered sacrifices and were sprinkled with the blood, in token that they deserved to die, and could be cleansed only by the blood of atonement. We come in the same manner to the blood of Christ.

They looked through the typical sacrifices to him who was in due time to be offered. We look to him, who in due time was offered for our sins upon the cross.

***~~In coming thus to Christ we experience all the efficacy of his blood—~~***

Were we afar off? We are now brought near to God, [Ephesians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.13).

Were we enemies to God? We are now reconciled to him, [Colossians 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.20).

Were we condemned for our iniquities? We are now justified, [Romans 5:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.9).

Were our minds filled with a sense of guilt and a dread of punishment? Our hearts are now sprinkled from an evil conscience, [Hebrews 10:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.22), and enjoy peace with God, [Romans 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.1).

Were we strangers to communion with God? We now have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, [Hebrews 10:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.19).

Were we enslaved by evil habits? We are now purged from dead works to serve the living God, [Hebrews 9:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.14).

Did a sentence of eternal misery await us? We now look forward to the fruits of an eternal redemption, [Hebrews 9:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.12); [Hebrews 9:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.15).

Such is the interest that the Christian has in the blood of sprinkling; and in this sense it may be said of every believer, that he is "come to" it.

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

***~~1. Let us inquire whether we have indeed come to the blood of sprinkling—~~***

It is not every nominal professor, who has approached God in this way: "all are not Israel who are of Israel." The outward form indeed which was observed by Moses is not required under the Christian dispensation; nor need we feel his terror, in order to obtain his comforts. But we must seriously draw near to God, sprinkling ourselves, as it were, with the blood of Christ, and professing our entire reliance upon that for our acceptance with him.

Yes, we must go to God in the very spirit and temper in which Abel offered his sacrifice; not merely thanking him with pharisaic pride, as Cain may be supposed to have done; but smiting on our bosoms like the Publican, and imploring mercy for Christ's sake.

Have we done this? Or rather, are we doing it yet daily? On this depends our happiness, both in this world and in the world to come.

If God at this moment gives us the witness of his Spirit in our consciences that this is indeed our experience, let us rejoice in such a testimony, and be thankful for it. But if our consciences condemn us, O! let us delay no longer, but instantly sprinkle ourselves with that precious blood, on account of which he will speak peace unto our souls.

***~~2. Let us endeavor to fulfill the obligations which this blood entails upon us—~~***

When Moses sprinkled the Jews, and read to them the book of the covenant, they said, "All that the Lord has said will we do, and be obedient!" O that there may be in us also such a heart—such a heart, I mean, not merely to promise, but to perform our promises! Certainly this is the end for which Christ shed his blood; he died, not merely to bring us to the enjoyment of privileges, but to lead us to the performance of our duties, "he gave himself for us, to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works." Let us then strive to walk worthy of our high calling; and let "the love of Christ constrain us to live unto him, who died for us and rose again!"

***~~#2341~~***

***~~GOD TO BE SERVED WITH REVERENTIAL FEAR~~***

**[Hebrews 12:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.28-29)**

"Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire!"

THE Christian world are little aware how much we are indebted to the holy Apostles, or rather to God, by whose inspiration they wrote, for the light which they have thrown upon the prophecies of the Old Testament. To this hour would we have been almost as much in the dark respecting the import of them as the Ethiopian Eunuch was, if God had not sent us persons authorized and empowered to unfold their true meaning.

The passage which that Gentile proselyte was reading when Philip joined himself to his chariot, was as clear as any part of Isaiah's prophecies: yet, when asked by Philip, "Do you understand what you read?" he replied, "How can I, except someone guides me, [Acts 8:28-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.28-31)." Just so, we would have still been at a loss to know of whom the prophets spoke in numberless passages, [Acts 8:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.34), if God had not raised up holy men to give us the desired information.

Let us take for instance, the prophecy which is cited by the Apostle in the verses before our text. It is taken from the Prophet Haggai, and is adduced by Paul in order to confirm his preceding declarations respecting the superiority of the Christian dispensation above that of the Jews. And we may well suppose that an uninspired Jew, if conversant with the Scriptures, would have understood the passage as referring to the Messiah, [Haggai 2:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Haggai 2.6-7). The construction which he would have put upon it would probably have been to this effect: 'God shook the earth when he established the Mosaic dispensation: but, when he shall introduce the Messiah himself, he will do it with far greater convulsions of universal nature.'

But let us see the explanation of it which the Apostle has given to us: He first somewhat alters the words, in order to make them express more fully the mind of God in them; and then he gives us this interpretation of them: "The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken--that is, created things--so that what cannot be shaken may remain, [Hebrews 12:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.27)" Thus he shows us that not any convulsion of nature was intended, like that which took place at Mount Sinai: *the total removal of the whole civil and ecclesiastical polity of the Jews was predicted, in order to make way for the immoveable and everlasting kingdom of the Messiah*.

Then, on the passage thus explained, he founds this exhortation: "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire!"

The points to be especially noticed in this passage are,

***~~I. The privilege which all true Christians have received—~~***

"They have received a kingdom which cannot be shaken." They have received it:

***~~1. As that to which they are to submit—~~***

The Lord Jesus Christ is he of whom Jehovah has said, "Yet I have set my King upon my holy hill of Zion, [Psalm 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.6)." And "his kingdom admits of no change." The dispensation which had been introduced by Moses, "waxed old, and vanished away;" but that which Christ has established is ever "new, [Hebrews 8:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.13)." "His dominion," says the prophet, "is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom is that which shall not be destroyed, [Daniel 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 7.14)." Men and devils will no doubt combine for its destruction: but "the gates of Hell shall never prevail against it, [Matthew 16:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.18)."

To this kingdom all true believers belong. They once were vassals of the god of this world: but they have been "translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son!" Their language now is, "Other lords besides you have had dominion over us; but by you alone, will we make mention of your name [Isaiah 26:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.13)." Into the name of Christ they have been baptized; and to his service have they willingly devoted themselves; engaging to fulfill his will, and even to lay down their lives, if need be, for his sake.

***~~2. As that which they are to inherit—~~***

All the blessings of this kingdom are theirs: and it is administered altogether for their good. *The King himself has each Christian's interest in view, as much as if he had not another subject in his realm to occupy his attention!*Their enemies are all restrained, and shall all, not excepting Satan himself, before long be bruised under their feet. All the *protection*which they can need, and all the *provision*which their souls can desire, are secured to them: "they dwell on high; their place of defense is the munition of rocks: their bread is daily given to them, and their water is sure [Isaiah 33:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 33.16)."

Nor can these be moved, any more than the kingdom itself can. Neither time nor chance can impair the blessings themselves, or rob them of the enjoyment of them. The pardon, the peace, the holiness, the glory, are theirs—not for time only, but for eternity! And this is the portion, not of some few favored individuals only, such as Prophets and Apostles, but of every believer, however poor, however unworthy.

To the whole body of believers, without exception, it is said, "Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom! [Luke 12:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.32)." Hear this, you who are poor in this world; and survey the riches to which God has chosen you! [James 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.5). In respect of your earthly state, you may be said to be "upon a dunghill: but God has taken you thence, to set you among the princes! [1 Samuel 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.8)." "You have received a kingdom:" "Christ has appointed to you a kingdom, even as his Father has appointed unto him a kingdom, [Luke 22:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.29);" and has ordained that "you shall sit with him upon his throne, as he sits on his Father's throne, [Revelation 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.21);" you may be "beggars," as it respects temporal possessions; but you are "kings [Revelation 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.6);" and respecting all of you, Jehovah himself says, "I know your poverty; but you are rich! [Revelation 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.9)."

Let not any, however, be so elated with their privilege as to overlook,

***~~II. Their duty as connected with it—~~***

***~~"We must serve God with reverence and godly fear"—~~***

Privilege and duty are so connected that they can never under any circumstances be separated from each other; and any attempt to separate them will infallibly outcome in our ruin. A kingdom has been given us, it is true: and "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance." But you must "serve God," and serve him too "with reverence and godly fear." We must not presume upon his mercy, or take occasion from it to indulge in carelessness and supineness. We must never forget with what a God we have to do. "He is a great God, and greatly to be feared!"

Though his dispensations are altered, he himself is not altered: "He is a consuming fire" now, as much as he was in the day that he proclaimed his law from Mount Sinai: and he must still "be had in reverence by all those who are round about him [Psalm 89:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.7)." True, indeed, we are not now to "fear and quake before him," as the Israelites, and Moses himself, then did: for "he has not given us the spirit of bondage again to fear, but a Spirit of adoption, whereby we may cry: *Abba, Father!*[Romans 8:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.15);" but still we must "stand in awe of him, [Psalm 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.11); [Psalm 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 4.4)," and fear to offend him, knowing that "he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity without the utmost abhorrence of it, [Habakkuk 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 1.13)." In whoever willful sin is found, he will visit it with fiery indignation; and most of all in those who profess themselves his servants, [Amos 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 3.2). "If we regard iniquity in our hearts, he will not hear us," or acknowledge us. We must seek to "be holy, as he is holy;" and "perfect, as he is perfect:" and the circumstance of our having been "sealed by him unto the day of redemption," is a reason why we should be more than ever careful, not either by word or deed, and, if possible, not even by a thought, to "grieve his Holy Spirit, [Ephesians 4:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.30)." Our labor would be to have "our every thought brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, [2 Corinthians 10:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 10.5)." It is in this way alone that we can serve God "acceptably:" and in this way alone that we can prove our title to the kingdom which we profess to have received.

***~~For strength to do this, we must seek his grace from day to day—~~***

We have no strength in ourselves even for a good thought, [2 Corinthians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.5), "Without Christ we can do nothing, [John 14:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.5)." But there is a fullness of grace treasured up in him; and out of his fullness must we continually receive those supplies of grace which we stand in need of, [Colossians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.19) with [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16). We must not be satisfied with such a measure of grace as may suffice to bring us to God: but must labor for such a measure as may enable us to serve him, and to "serve him acceptably" to the last hour of our lives. Especially must we seek:  
a meekness of spirit,  
a humility of mind,  
a tenderness of conscience,  
a purity of heart,  
a hatred of sin, an abhorrence of ourselves on account of sin,  
a holy desire to please God,  
a love to his will,  
a delight in his service, and  
an utter contempt even of life itself, in comparison with his honor and glory.

But these are attainments which he alone can give. Therefore we must cry day and night unto him for more and more grace, and must labor for them only in a dependence on his Spirit.

To this state of mind we must be brought by the consideration of the unbounded mercies bestowed upon us: "Having received a kingdom," we must thus seek his grace, and thus labor joyfully to fulfill his will: for so the Apostle elsewhere teaches us: "I beseech you by the mercies of God that you present yourselves a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, as your reasonable service, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1)."

***~~The concluding declaration in our text deserving more especial notice, I will draw your attention to it,~~***

***~~1. To augment your thankfulness for the Gospel of Christ—~~***

We see how terrible the presence of God was when he appeared as a consuming fire upon Mount Sinai. But how much more terrible is it in that world where he is inflicting vengeance both on men and devils as the monuments of his wrath! Yet that is the view of him which *we*would have had to all eternity, if the Lord Jesus Christ had not interposed to effect our reconciliation with him, and to restore us to his favor. Can we reflect on this, and not adore that blessed Savior, who "bore our sins in his own body on the tree," and "died, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God!"

Think for a moment of that place which he has "ordained of old, the pile whereof is fire and much wood, and the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, does kindle it, [Isaiah 30:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 30.33)." Think of the state of the souls which are confined there, all of them drinking "of the wine of God's wrath, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation, and tormented with fire and brimstone, having no rest, and the smoke of their torment ascending up for ever and ever! [Revelation 14:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 14.10-11)." And then let us ask ourselves, "Who among us can dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings! [Isaiah 33:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 33.14)."

Truly, if we would more habituate ourselves to consider the justice, and holiness, and majesty of our God, we would know no bounds to our gratitude for the work of redemption: our every thought would be thankfulness, and our every word be praise!

***~~2. To preserve upon your minds a holy dread of sin—~~***

Still must it be said, as in the days of old, "The Lord your God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God! [Deuteronomy 4:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 4.24);" and we would never for a moment lose sight of him under that character. It is fit that he would be jealous, and allow no rival in our hearts.*In harboring any unhallowed lust, we are as great enemies to our own happiness as we are to his glory.*He would have loved us less, if he had given us any reason to hope for impunity in the ways of sin.

Be then jealous over yourselves with a godly jealousy, lest there be found in you anything which is displeasing in his sight. Let your *conscience*be tender even as the apple of your eye: and if but a mote come upon it, let it not abide there for a moment; but weep it away with tears of penitential sorrow, and wash it away with the blood of Christ, which alone can cleanse you even from the smallest sin!

Bear in mind, that what you are in respect of holiness, that you are in the sight of God: and recollecting, that "his eyes are as a flame of fire," and that "he weighs, not your actions" only, but "even your spirits" also, "be diligent that you may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless! [2 Peter 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.14)."

***~~#2342~~***

***~~COMPASSION TO THE DISTRESSED INCULCATED~~***

***~~[Hebrews 13:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.3)~~***

"Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering."

IN the first ages of Christianity *persecution*raged to a degree that we at this time have little conception of: chains and imprisonment were a common lot, especially among those who were active in the service of their Lord. The loss of all things was also frequently added to the other trials of the saints; so that their afflictions were greatly multiplied and exceeding heavy. At such a season, it was incumbent on every member of the Church to compassionate the distresses of his afflicted brethren, and by a participation of their burdens to lighten their pressure, and to alleviate the sorrows occasioned by them. To this they might well be stimulated by the consideration that they themselves were constantly exposed to the same trials, and might soon need the same relief which they were administering to others.

Through the goodness of God we know but little of these trials. The persecutions of the present day amount to little more than contempt and hatred, and in some few instances a little outward opposition to our worldly interests. Still however there are afflictions of other kinds in abundance to which we all are subject; and under which it befits us all to manifest the tenderest compassion towards each other, not knowing how soon it may become our own lot to need the sympathy which we ourselves have exercised. In this view, the exhortation in our text deserves the attention of every man. Let us notice in it,

***~~I. The duty inculcated—~~***

*Compassion towards our suffering fellow-creatures is a duty universally acknowledged.* If the household of faith are entitled to a preference in our regards, as certainly they are, [Galatians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.10), our benevolence is not to be restricted to them: it is to be exercised generally towards all the sons and daughters of affliction; and that too in a way of,

***~~1. Tender sympathy—~~***

We should "remember them that are in bonds" or afflictions of any kind, not with a transient sigh, or a few customary expressions of condolence, but "as actually bound with them," and as being ourselves partakers of their sorrows. We can read of the desolations and ravages of war, or of the miseries occasioned by storms and tempests—and pass them over almost without any emotion, and in a few minutes utterly forget them. If we felt aright, we would enter into all the troubles of the sufferers, just as if we ourselves were in their very state and condition.

Paint to yourselves the anguish of shipwrecked mariners, expecting every moment to be their last: or, if their feelings may be supposed to be so acute as not to be capable of being transfused into the bosom of one who is not exposed to such perils, conceive of persons immured in dungeons, or racked with pains and destitute of all needful support; or contemplate the widow bereaved of all that she held dear in this world, and of all that she relied on for the support of herself and her helpless offspring. I say, conceive of sorrows as brought home to your own bosom, and as experienced in your own soul—and then you will see how you ought to realize in your minds the miseries of others, and to pant for an opportunity to relieve them.

***~~2. Fervent prayer—~~***

"Intercession," we are told, "should be made for all men;" but more especially should it be so in behalf of those, whose troubles render them objects of more than ordinary compassion. James says, "Is any sick among you, let him call for the elders of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick: and, if he has committed sins, they shall be forgiven him, [James 5:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.14-15)."

You well know how a man will plead with God for the wife of his bosom, or for his beloved child, whose death he apprehends to be fast approaching. Thus would we enter into the distresses of others also, and would plead with God in their behalf. David did thus even in behalf of his very enemies: "When they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth, and I humbled my soul with fasting, [Psalm 35:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 35.13);" and in this way should we also make our prayer unto God, in the hope that he will interpose effectually in their behalf, and bestow on them the blessings which it is not within the power of any finite creature to impart.

***~~3. Active services—~~***

We are not to say, "Be warmed, and be filled; and at the same time withhold" from our brethren the aid which we are able to bestow, [James 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.15-16); such compassion as that is mere hypocrisy. Our Lord tells us in what way our sympathy would display itself, "I was hungry, and you gave me food; I was thirsty, and you gave me drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in; naked, and you clothed me; I was sick, and you visited me; I was in prison, and you came unto me, [Matthew 25:35-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.35-36)." All indeed have it not in their power to exert themselves to the same extent: some have more leisure time, and more ability, than others: but all can do something for their poor neighbors: some friendly service they can render; some word of comfort they can speak: and what they cannot administer in their own persons, they may procure through the instrumentality of others.

At all events, if it is only a cup of cold water that we can bestow, it should be given with a zeal and tenderness that shall evince the strength of an internal principle, and the wish that our means were more adequate to the occasion.

The proper example for us to follow, is that of the Macedonians, of whom the Apostle testifies, "Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints, [2 Corinthians 8:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.2-4)." This is the point to be aimed at: there must first be a willing mind: and, where that is, God will accept the offering, however small, [2 Corinthians 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.12).

Such is the duty here inculcated. Let us now attend to,

***~~II. The consideration with which it is enforced—~~***

When the Apostle says, "Do this," as being yourselves also in the body, he must be understood as intimating,

***~~1. That we ourselves are exposed to the same afflictions as others—~~***

And this is true respecting every living man. No one is exempt from trouble. If any man was ever justified in saying, "I shall die in my nest," it was Job. Yet behold he, with all his wealth and power, was in a few days reduced to the most abject state that can he imagined. *There are ten thousand sources of affliction*which God may open, and cause our souls to be deluged with it in an instant. Our *bodies*may be racked with disease, or our *hearts*be overwhelmed with domestic troubles. Or, while all external things are prospering, our souls may be so bowed down with a sense of sin, and so agitated with a dread of God's judgments, that we may hate our very existence, and "choose strangling rather than life." Indeed whoever he is that thinks with David, "My mountain stands strong, I shall not be moved;" he may expect, that God will speedily "hide his face from him; and that trouble shall before long come upon him," as the punishment of his iniquity.

***~~2. That what measure we mete out to others, we may expect to have meted out to ourselves—~~***

Mankind at large feel a far greater disposition to exert themselves in behalf of a man of active benevolence, than they do for one whose regards have terminated on himself alone. But it is not on the good dispositions of men that we are called to rely. God himself has engaged, that what we do for others, he will accept as done to himself; and "that what we lend to him, he will repay us again." Very remarkable are his promises to this effect: "Blessed is he who has regard for the weak; the LORD delivers him in times of trouble. The LORD will protect him and preserve his life; he will bless him in the land and not surrender him to the desire of his foes. The LORD will sustain him on his sickbed and restore him from his bed of illness, [Psalm 41:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 41.1-3)."

The language of the Prophet Isaiah is yet stronger still: "If you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail, [Isaiah 58:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.10-11)." Here Almighty God himself is pledged to recompense into our bosom the kindness which we show to others: and "he will recompense it in full measure, pressed down, and running over."

If then we would have consolations ministered to us in our troubles, let us labor to impart them to our afflicted brethren: for "what we sow, we shall reap;" if we supply the wants of others, God will supply ours, [Philippians 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.14); [Philippians 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.19); and if "we cast our bread upon the waters, we shall be sure to find it after many days."

***~~For your direction in reference to this duty, we beg permission to offer the following hints:~~***

***~~1. Do not undervalue the grace of charity—~~***

It is too often overlooked, not only by the world at large, but also by many who profess godliness; who imagine that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is all that is needful for their best interests. But let me say, that, whatever faith a man may have, "if he has not love also, real, active, self-denying love, he is no better than sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal." Only recollect how great a stress James lays on "visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction," when he declares, that "pure and undefiled religion" mainly consists in such offices; and you will never be satisfied until you attain this heavenly disposition, nor ever think that you can exercise it too much.

***~~2. Do not overvalue it—~~***

If you put your own benevolence in the place of Christ, and rely on that to purchase the remission of your sins, you will then indeed build on a foundation of sand. Know, that however much you may abound in acts of benevolence, "you are still unprofitable servants, who have done only what it was your duty to do." If you really seek the glory of God in what you do, your services will come up with acceptance before him, and they will be to him as a sweet fragrance. But you must never forget that "your goodness extends not to God," nor can confer any obligation upon him. On the contrary, the more you do for him, the more you are indebted to him; because "all your power either to will or do what is good, is from him alone." "It is not you that do it, but the grace of God that is with you."

***~~3. Endeavor to abound in charity more and more—~~***

See the character of holy Job: "Whoever heard me spoke well of me, and those who saw me commended me, because I rescued the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to assist him. The man who was dying blessed me; I made the widow's heart sing, [Job 29:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 29.11-13)." O what a lovely character was that! What a bright resemblance of the Savior, "who went about doing good!"

Dear brethren, set this example before you, and strive to imitate it to the utmost of your power. Thus will you shine as lights in the world; and thus "fulfilling the law of Christ, [Galatians 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.3)," you will ensure his approbation in the day of judgment, [Hebrews 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.10). [1 Timothy 6:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.17-19).

***~~#2343~~***

***~~GODS PROMISED PRESENCE, AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO DUTY~~***

***~~[Hebrews 13:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.5-6)~~***

"Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"

*THE end of Scriptural knowledge is Scriptural practice*. Hence the Apostle closes all his epistles with practical exhortations. The argumentative part of this epistle terminated at the close of the preceding chapter. This chapter begins with some particular exhortations suited to the Hebrews at that time. The *advice*contained in our text is suited to the Church in every state and every age: and the *encouragement*with which it is enforced, gives it a more than common interest. In truth, it is the promised presence and assistance of God, which is our great incentive to every duty; since without his aid we can do nothing, but with it we can effect whatever God himself requires of us.

Let us consider,

***~~I. The promise here recorded—~~***

The promise was originally given to Joshua: but in our text it is represented as spoken to each of *us.*And in this light it ought to be viewed: for it was not given to Joshua as a mere isolated individual, but as the head of God's people, whom he was conducting into Canaan: and between them and us there is a close resemblance: they were about to conflict with many enemies, whom they must destroy, before they could possess the promised land. Just so, *we also must sustain many conflicts before we can attain the full enjoyment of the heavenly Canaan*. To us therefore there is the same need of the promise, as to Joshua; and to us also is there the same right and title; seeing that it was spoken for the encouragement of all God's Israel to the end of time.

The promise that God "will never leave us nor forsake us," imports that:

***~~1. God will be ever with us, in the operations of his providence—~~***

There is nothing in the whole universe which is not under God's sovereign control. "Not even a sparrow falls to the ground" without his special appointment: and "the very hairs of our head are all numbered." Circumstances indeed may occur which may cause us to tremble for the outcome of them: but he will so overrule them all, as to "make them eventually work together for our good, [Romans 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.28)." We may be reduced almost to despair; and may be ready to say with the Church of old, "The Lord has forsaken and forgotten us! [Isaiah 49:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.14);" but he will before long force us to acknowledge that such fears were the fruit only of "our own infirmity, [Psalm 77:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.7-10);" and that the very things which we complained of as "against us," were no other than his appointed means for accomplishing all his gracious designs towards us, [Genesis 42:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 42.36).

Our dangers may be as imminent as those of Israel at the Red Sea; but that shall be the time for Him to open for us a way to escape from them. Our needs may be as urgent as those of Israel afterwards in the wilderness; but that shall be the time for giving us manna from Heaven, and water from the rock. The time for any interposition may seem to have actually elapsed; but still "in the mount the Lord it shall be seen," precisely as he was when he arrested the uplifted arm of Abraham, and restored his Isaac to his embrace. "The vision may tarry; but never beyond the appointed and the fittest time, [Habakkuk 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 2.3)."

***~~2. God will be ever with us, by the communications of his grace—~~***

These are necessary for us, and must be renewed to us day by day: and if for one moment they be suspended, we must inevitably fall. But God will not withdraw from his waiting and praying people. He may indeed allow temptations to arise, such as shall threaten to plunge us into irremediable ruin; and he may even permit Satan for a time to prevail against us; but still he will not utterly forsake us; but will restore our souls, and *make our very falls subservient to the augmenting of our humility and watchfulness throughout the remainder of our lives*, and to the qualifying of us for warning, and exhorting, and comforting others with increased effect, [Luke 22:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.31-32).

So also he may permit our trials to abide; and, though entreated by us ever so much, may not see fit to remove them. But "his grace shall be sufficient for us," and shall be the more magnified in us, in proportion as our conflicts are severe, and our victories conspicuous, [2 Corinthians 12:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.7-9).

He may, for wise and gracious purposes, hide his face from us; but it shall be only for a little moment, that the riches of his grace may be the more abundantly displayed in the subsequent manifestations of his love and favor, [Isaiah 54:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.7-10). If it is asked, why he will thus continue his loving-kindness to them? We answer, "For his own sake," and because "he changes not, [Malachi 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.6). [James 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.17). [Romans 11:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.29);" as it is said, "He will not forsake his people; because it has pleased him to make you his people, [1 Samuel 12:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 12.22)."

That this promise may produce its due effects, let us consider,

***~~II. The use we should make of this promise—~~***

Innumerable are the benefits to be derived from it: but we shall specify only two. This promise should encourage us to discard, as unworthy of us:

***~~1. All inordinate desires—~~***

This promise should cause us to, "Keep our lives free from the love of money and to be content with what we have." We should desire nothing which God has not seen fit to give us, nor murmur at anything which he has ordained for us. For, what can we lack that is truly good for us, or what can we have to complain of, while he is with us?

Would any worldly good add to our happiness, or give any security to us for its continuance?

Would treasures, however great, be a richer portion than he?

Would the loss of them be felt, if it led us to seek more entirely our happiness in him?

"When he gives quietness, who then can make trouble, [Job 34:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 34.29)." If we have but the light of his countenance lifted up upon us, nothing can augment, nor can anything diminish, our bliss.

Many of these Hebrews had "taken joyfully the confiscation of their goods:" and thousands in every age have been able to testify from their own blessed experience, that "as their afflictions have abounded, so also have their consolations abounded by Christ, [2 Corinthians 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.5)." Let us only possess "the Lord for the portion of our inheritance and of our cup; and have that lot maintained to us;" and however small our portion be as it respects this world, we shall have reason to say, "The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places, and I have a goodly heritage, [Psalm 16:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 16.5-6)."

***~~2. All anxious fears—~~***

The ungodly imagine that they can prevail against the Lord's people: but they are no more than an axe or saw in the hands of him who uses it: they can do no more than our God and Father is pleased to do by them, [Isaiah 10:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 10.15).

Now who will tremble at a sword that is in his father's hands? If indeed our God were ever weary, or absent, or disinclined to interpose for us, or if the creature could effect anything without his special permission—then there would be some reason for fear: but when he is as "our shade upon our right hand;" when he is as "a wall of fire round about us, and the glory in the midst of us, [Zechariah 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 2.5);" whom shall we fear? "Who can have access to harm us, [1 Peter 3:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.13-15)," if we are hidden under the shadow of His wings? "If he is for us, then who can be against us? [Romans 8:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.31)."

Whatever confederacies then may be against us, whether of men or devils, we need not fear: in Him, as our sanctuary, we may deride their efforts, and defy their malice, [Isaiah 8:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.12-14). The holy Psalmist has shown us what should be the state of our minds:

[Psalm 56:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 56.1-4), "Be merciful to me, O God, for men hotly pursue me; all day long they press their attack. My slanderers pursue me all day long; many are attacking me in their pride. When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?"

[Psalm 56:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 56.9-11), "Then my enemies will turn back when I call for help. By this I will know that God is for me. In God, whose word I praise, in the LORD, whose word I praise--in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"

***~~Learn then,~~***

***~~1. Of what importance it is to treasure up the promises in our minds and hearts—~~***

*The promises of God are our great support under trials, and at the same time our great encouragements to fulfill our duty*; since they assure us of all needful aid, both for the sustaining of the one, and the performance of the other. It is by them that we are enabled to cleanse ourselves from sin, 2 Corinthians 7:1; and by them to attain the image of God upon our souls, [2 Peter 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.4). Let us then lay hold of them; and, to whoever they may have been spoken in the first instance, appropriate them to ourselves. Let us rest upon them, and plead them before God, as Jacob did, [Genesis 28:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 28.15) with 32:12; and know that "in Christ they are all yes, and amen! [2 Corinthians 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.20)," as unchangeable as God himself!

O what a treasure does that man possess who has laid up in his mind the most comprehensive promises of his God! He can be in no trouble, wherein he has not abundant consolation; and in no need, wherein he has not an adequate supply. O beloved, let the word of Christ, and the promises of your God, "dwell in you richly in all wisdom." God will never violate his promise, "Heaven and earth shall pass away; but not one jot or tittle of that promise shall ever fail! [Matthew 24:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.35)."

***~~2. How truly blessed is a life of faith—~~***

*What a source of misery to mankind is a covetous and discontented spirit!* What a prey are they to trouble, who have no refuge from the cares and fears which agitate the ungodly world! But faith in God is a perfect antidote to them all. It assures us of our God ever near at hand to help and support his believing people. See how the promise in our text is introduced: it is there suggested as sufficient to counterbalance the loss of everything, however desirable, or the apprehension of everything, however formidable.

It is suggested, in order to inspire us with a confidence which nothing can intimidate: "We may boldly say, The Lord is my helper; I will not fear what man can do unto me." Think of an angel sent down to sojourn here: what would either the acquisition or loss of riches affect him? Or would any confederacies either of men or devils concern him? He would feel as satisfied and as secure as if he were in Heaven itself. This then is the tranquility which we also, according to the measure of our faith, are privileged to enjoy. Let us then "know in whom we have believed." Let us "cast all our care on him who cares for us! [1 Peter 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.7)." And let us so realize the promises of our God, as to know that nothing ever shall, or ever can separate us from his love!

[Psalm 46:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 46.1-3), "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. Selah"

[Romans 8:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.38-39), "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!"

***~~#2344~~***

***~~THE GLORY OF CHRIST~~***

***~~[Hebrews 13:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.8)~~***

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever!"

The creature is frail and changeable, but the Lord Jesus Christ is from eternity to eternity the same.

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

(This may be treated under the five several heads here specified.)

***~~II. Our duty in relation to him—~~***

***~~1. Seek above all things the knowledge of him—~~***

The preaching of Christ is all our duty, [Acts 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.20); [Acts 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.5); [Acts 9:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.20); and to acquire the knowledge of him is your duty, [John 17:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.3). [Philippians 3:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.7-8).

***~~2. Guard against everything that may divert you from him—~~***

Hold fast the instructions which have led you to Christ, verse 7; but on no account listen to "strange doctrines" that would lead you from him, verse 9. Whoever is taken from you, Christ remains; and you must "cleave unto him with full purpose of heart." But beware of false teachers, such as there are and ever have been in the Church: for, whatever they may press upon you, there is nothing that deserves your attention but Christ crucified, [1 Corinthians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.2).

***~~3. Improve to the uttermost your saving interest in him—~~***

Seek to realize everything that is spoken of Christ, and to make him your all in all. [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16). [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20). [Colossians 3:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.1-4).

In this present earthly state, wherein the affairs both of individuals and of nations are liable to continual fluctuation, the mind needs some principle capable of supporting it under every adverse circumstance that may occur. *Philosophy*offers its aid in vain: the light of unassisted *reason*is unable to impart any effectual relief: but *revelation*points to God; to God, as reconciled to us in the Son of his love: it directs our views to him who "changes not;" and who, under all the troubles of life, invites us to rely on his paternal care.

Every page of the inspired writings instructs us to say with David, "When I am in trouble, I will think upon God."

Are we alarmed with tidings of a projected invasion, and apprehensive of national calamities? God speaks to us as to his people of old, [Isaiah 8:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.12-14), "Do not call conspiracy everything that these people call conspiracy; do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it. The LORD Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread, and he will be a sanctuary."

Are we agitated by a sense of personal danger? that same almighty Friend expostulates with us, [Isaiah 51:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.12-13), "Who are you, that you would be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man that shall be as grass, and forget the Lord your Maker?"

Are we, as in the present instance, afflicted for the Church of God? has God taken away the pastor, who "fed you with knowledge and understanding?" Is there reason to fear, that now, your "Shepherd being removed, the sheep may be scattered," and "grievous wolves may enter in among you, not sparing the flock; yes, that even of your own selves some may arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them, [Acts 20:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.29-30)." Behold! such was the state of the Hebrews, when this epistle was written to them: and the Apostle, studious to fortify them against the impending danger, exhorts them to remember their deceased pastors, following their faith, and considering the blessed way in which they had terminated their life.

Moreover, as the most effectual means of preserving them from being "carried about with any strange doctrines," different from what had been delivered to them, he suggests to them this thought, That Jesus Christ, who had been ever preached among them, and who was the one foundation of all their hopes, was still the same; the same infinitely gracious, almighty, and ever-blessed Savior! "Remember," says he, "them which have had the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the Word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conduct: Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever."

These last words were chosen by your late worthy minister, as his subject on the first day of this year, and, as I am informed, were particularly recommended to you as your motto for this current year. On this, as well as other accounts, they seem to claim peculiar attention from us: and, O that the good Spirit of God may accompany them with his blessing, while we endeavor to improve them, and to offer from them such considerations as may appear suited to you, under your present most afflictive circumstances!

Your late faithful, loving, and much beloved pastor is no more: he who was, not in profession merely, but in truth, "a guide to the blind, a light of those who were in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, and a teacher of babes." He who for so many years spent all his time, and found all his delight, in imparting the knowledge of salvation both to old and young; he, I say, is taken from you; and your loss is unspeakably severe.

But is *all*gone? No. He who formed him by his grace, raised him up to be a witness, and sent him to preach the Gospel to you for a season, remains the same; he has still "the fullness of the Spirit," and can send forth ten thousand such laborers into his vineyard, whenever it shall please him. Though the creature, on whose lips you have so often hung with profit and delight, is now no more—yet the Creator, the Redeemer, the Savior of the world is still the same; Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever. He is the same:  
in the dignity of his person,  
in the extent of his power,  
in the virtue of his sacrifice,  
in the tenderness of his compassion,  
and in fidelity to his promises.

***~~Jesus Christ is the same in the dignity of his person—~~***

The terms "yesterday, today, and for ever," are expressive of a true and proper eternity: they do not import merely a long duration, but an existence that never had a beginning, nor shall ever have an end. In this view they are frequently applied to Jehovah, to distinguish him from any creature, however exalted he might be. When God revealed his name to Moses, that name whereby he was to be made known to the Israelites, he called himself I AM: "say to them, I AM has sent me unto you:" and John expressly distinguishing the Father both from Jesus Christ, and from the Holy Spirit, calls him the person "who is, and was, and is to come."

Now this august title is given repeatedly to Jesus Christ, both in the Old and New Testament. The very words of our text evidently refer to the 102nd Psalm, where the psalmist, indisputably speaking of Jehovah, says, "You are the same, and your years shall have no end." And lest there would be the smallest doubt to whom this character belongs, the author of this epistle quotes the words in the very first chapter, [Hebrews 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.12), insists upon them as immediately applicable to the Messiah, and adduces them in proof, that Christ was infinitely superior to any created being, even "God blessed for evermore." Our Lord himself on various occasions asserted his claim to this title: to the carnal Jews, who thought him a mere creature like themselves, he said, "Before Abraham was, I AM!" And when he appeared to John in a vision, he said, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty! [Revelation 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.8)." Behold then the dignity of our Lord and Savior! "His goings forth have been from everlasting, [Micah 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 5.2);" he was set up "from everlasting; from the beginning, or before ever the earth was, [Proverbs 8:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 8.23)." We must say of him, in the words of David, "From everlasting to everlasting you are God!"

And is this a matter of small importance? Does the Christian feel no interest in this truth? Yes, is it not the very foundation of all his comforts? He may be deemed a bigot for laying such a stress on the divinity of Christ: but having once tasted the bitterness, and seen the malignity of sin, he is well persuaded, that the blood of a creature could never have availed to expiate his guilt, nor could anything less than "the righteousness of God" himself, suffice for his acceptance in the day of judgment.

Know then, believer, that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever: he is the eternal and immutable Jehovah! *He is worthy of all your love, of all your trust, of all your confidence.* You need never be afraid of thinking too highly of him: when you "honor him as you honor the Father," then you regard him in the manner that befits him: when you bow the knee before him, and confess him as your Sovereign Lord, then you most effectually glorify God the Father, [Philippians 2:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.10-11).

Remember then, under all the trying dispensations you may meet with, and, most of all, under the bereavement which you are now so bitterly lamenting, that he in whom you have believed, is an all-sufficient Savior; and that when you look to him for any blessing whatever, you may cry with confident assurance, "My Lord, and my God."

The ministers of the Church "are not allowed to continue by reason of death." That tongue which lately was "as a tree of life," under the shadow of which you sat with great delight, and the fruit whereof was sweet unto your taste, now lies silent in the tomb. Our departed friend has experienced that change, which sooner or later awaits us all. He will before long experience a still further change, when "his corruptible shall put on incorruption, and his mortal shall put on immortality;" when his body, that now lies moldering in the dust, shall be "raised like unto Christ's glorious body," and "shine above the sun in the firmament for ever and ever!" He is not today what he was yesterday: nor shall be for ever what he now is. This honor of eternal, immutable self-existence, belongs not to the highest archangel; for though the angels may be subject to no further change, it was but yesterday that they were first created. To Christ alone belongs this honor; and "with him there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

***~~Jesus Christ is eternally the same in the extent of his power.~~***

We are informed, both in the psalm from whence the text is taken, and in the first chapter of this epistle, where it is cited, that Jesus Christ was the Creator of the universe, "You, O Lord, in the beginning have laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of your hands." And from the first moment of its existence he has "upheld it by the word of his power." In the days of his flesh, he still exercised the same omnipotence: "Whatever the Father did, that did the Son likewise."

On ten thousand occasions he wrought the most stupendous miracles, and showed that every created being was subject to his will. He not only cleansed the lepers, and caused the blind to see, the deaf to hear, and the lame to walk, but he raised the dead, cast out devils, and controlled the very elements, saying to the wind: Be still! And to the waves, Be calm! Nor, in this, did he act as one that had received a delegated authority; but as one who had an essential, and unalienable light to exercise universal dominion.

Though, as man, he acknowledged subjection to his Father, and, as mediator, spoke and acted in his Father's name, yet, in all his miracles, he put forth a virtue inherent in himself; he made his own will the rule and measure of his conduct, and stamped the impression of divinity on all his actions. And is he not still the same? What he was yesterday, will he not also be today, and for ever?

Is there any disorder of the soul that he cannot heal?

Are there any lusts so raging that he cannot calm them; or so inveterate that he cannot root them out?

Cannot he who formed the crude and unformed chaos into order and beauty, create our souls anew?

Cannot he who said, "Let there be light, and there was light," transform our corrupted hearts into the Divine image in righteousness and true holiness?

Cannot he who "triumphed over all the principalities and powers" of Hell, "bruise Satan under our feet also?"

In short, "is there anything too hard for him?" No! He is still the same: he, to whom "all power in Heaven and in earth has been committed," still holds the reins of universal government, and "orders all things after the counsel of his own will."

What comfort may this afford you under your present affliction! It pleased him for a season to set over you a faithful pastor, by whom he has called hundreds into his fold, and "turned multitudes from the error of their ways." But though your honored minister was the instrument, he was only an instrument; he was but "an axe in the hands of him who hews therewith," an "earthen vessel in which was deposited the heavenly treasure," and by whom Christ communicated to you his "unsearchable riches!" "The excellency of the power was altogether Christ's."

Has the power ceased, because the instrument is laid aside? "Is the Lord's ear heavy, that he cannot hear? Is his hand shortened, that he cannot save?" O remember, that though the *stream*is cut off, the *fountain*still remains; and every one of you may go to it, and "receive out of your Redeemer's fullness, grace upon grace."

That same almighty arm that raised him up to be a faithful witness for the truth, that enabled him to despise the pleasures and honors of the world, and to devote himself wholly to the great work of the ministry—can do the same for his successor. You well know, that he, whose loss we bemoan, was not always that able and excellent minister that he afterwards proved to be. Be not then hasty, if all things be not at first agreeable to your mind:  
exercise meekness, patience, forbearance,  
seek to obtain nothing by force or faction,  
let the whole of your conduct be conciliating, and worthy of your Christian profession.

Above all, continue constant in prayer. Beg that "the Lord of the harvest, who alone can send forth faithful laborers into his harvest," will pour out in a more abundant measure his grace upon him, who by the good providence of God is about to take the charge of you. I do not say that God will at all events grant your particular requests; but this I say with confidence, that your prayers shall not fall to the ground; and that, if God, on the whole, will be most glorified in that way, your petitions shall be literally fulfilled, and "the spirit of Elijah shall rest on Elisha."

***~~Christ is ever the same in the virtue of his sacrifice.~~***

Though he was not manifested in human flesh until four thousand years had elapsed—yet his sacrifice availed for the salvation of thousands during the whole of that period. The sacrifice, which Abel offered, did not obtain those distinguished tokens of divine acceptance on account of its intrinsic worth, but because the offerer looked forward by faith to that great Sacrifice, which in the fullness of time was to be presented to God upon the cross, even to him, who, in purpose and effect, was the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

As for all other Old Testament sacrifices, they had no value whatever, but only as they typified that "one offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." When we see the high-priest and the elders of Israel putting their hands upon the scape-goat, and transferring to him all the sins of the whole congregation of Israel, that they might be carried into the land of oblivion, then we behold the efficacy of Christ's atonement. It is not to be imagined that the blood of bulls or of goats could take away sin. No, in every instance where the conscience of a sinner was really purged from guilt, the pardon was bestowed solely through "the blood of him, who, through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God."

And is not that, which throughout all the Mosaic dispensation, and from the very beginning of the world, availed for the remission of sins, still as efficacious as ever to all who trust in it? Or shall its virtue ever be diminished? Could David, after the commission of crimes, which "make the ears of every one that hears them to tingle," cry, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow!" And may not the most abandoned sinner now hope for mercy through "the blood of sprinkling?"

Could Saul, that blasphemer, that injurious and persecuting zealot, say of Christ, "He has loved me, and given himself for me!" Could he say, "I obtained mercy, that in me, the chief of sinners, Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to those who shall hereafter believe on him to life everlasting?" And shall any one be left to doubt whether there be hope for him? Surely we may still say with the same confidence that the Apostles declared it in the days of old, "We have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: he is the atoning sacrifice, not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the world: through him all who believe shall be justified from all things: the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin."

How sweetly have many of you experienced the truth of these declarations, when your dear minister has been insisting on this favorite topic, and "Christ has been set forth crucified, as it were, before your eyes!" How many of you, while lying at Bethesda's pool, have embraced the opportunity afforded you, and plunged beneath that water to the healing of your souls! Some others perhaps among you have been long hesitating, as it were, upon the brink, and doubting and questioning your right to wash in it: ah! chide your unbelief: know that "the fountain was opened for sin, and for impurity."

*Look not so much at the malignity of your sins, as at the infinite value of Christ's atonement!*And under every fresh contracted guilt, go to the fountain, wash in it, and be clean! Let there not be a day, if possible not an hour, wherein you do not make fresh application to the blood of Jesus: go to that to cleanse you, as well from "the iniquity of your most holy things," as from the more heinous violations of God's law; thus shall "your hearts be ever sprinkled clean from an evil conscience," and your "conscience itself be purged from dead works to serve the living God."

There are some of you indeed, it is to be feared, who have hitherto disregarded the invitations given you, and are yet ignorant of the virtue of this all-atoning sacrifice—you have unhappily remained dry and destitute of the heavenly dew, which has long fallen in rich abundance all around you. How long you may continue favored with such invitations, God alone knows: but O that you might this day begin to seek the Lord! He who once died on Calvary, still cries to you by my voice, "Look unto me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else!" Now then, obey his voice: say to him, "Draw me, that I may come unto you; draw me, and I will run after you." Thus shall you be numbered among those who are redeemed to God by his blood, and shall join, to all eternity, with your departed minister, and all the glorified saints, in singing, "To him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever, Amen!"

***~~It will be a further consolation to us to reflect that Jesus Christ is the same in the tenderness of his compassion—~~***

It was Christ who led the people of Israel through the wilderness, and who directed them by his servant Moses. This appears from the express declaration of Paul. We are told that the Israelites "tempted God in the desert, saying: Can he give bread also, and provide flesh for his people?" And Paul, speaking of them, says, "Neither tempt the Lord, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of the destroyer, [1 Corinthians 10:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.9)."

Now the tender compassion which Christ exercised towards his people in the wilderness, is made a frequent subject of devout acknowledgment in the Holy Scriptures. Isaiah says, "In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bore them, and carried them all the days of old, [Isaiah 63:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 63.9). Moses himself, who both experienced and witnessed God's compassion, describes it in terms as beautiful as imagination can conceive. [Deuteronomy 32:9-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.9-12), "For the LORD's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted inheritance. In a desert land he found him, in a barren and howling waste. He shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of his eye, like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions. The LORD alone led him."

In order to enter fully into its meaning, it will be proper to observe, that the eagle, when teaching her young to fly, flutters over them, and stirs them up to imitate her; she even thrusts them out of the nest, that they may be forced to exert their powers; and if she sees them in danger of falling, she flies instantly underneath them, catches them on her wings, and carries them back to their nest. In reference to this it is added, "Like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions. The LORD alone led him." Can anything present a more beautiful idea to the mind? Can any image whatever more forcibly impress us with admiring thoughts of Christ's tenderness and compassion?

Such was Jesus in the days of old: and is he not the same at this day? Will he not still "carry the lambs in his bosom, and gently lead those who are with young?" Can we produce in the annals of the world one single instance, wherein he "broke the bruised reed, or quenched the smoking flax?" Has he not invariably "brought forth judgment unto victory," and "perfected his own strength in his people's weakness?" Who among us has ever "sought his face in vain?" With whom has he ever refused to sympathize? Will not he who wept with the sisters of the deceased Lazarus; will not he who had compassion on the multitude because they were as sheep not having a shepherd; will not he who wept over the murderous and abandoned city, now weep over a disconsolate widow, a deserted people, and especially over those, who have "not known the day of their visitation, and whose eyes have never yet seen the things belonging to their peace?" Is he become an "High-priest that cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities;" or that, notwithstanding he has been "in all points tempted like as we are, has no disposition to support his tempted people?"

Unbelief and Satan may suggest such thoughts to our minds; but who must not attest that they are false? Who is not constrained to acknowledge, that "he is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger, and of great mercy?"

Here then again let the drooping souls rejoice! You, who are poor in this world, have lost a friend; a kind, compassionate friend, who, "according to his ability, and often beyond his ability," exerted himself to relieve your needs. You, who are of a broken and contrite spirit, ah! what a friend have you lost! How would the departed saint listen to all your complaints, and answer all your arguments, and encourage you to look to Jesus for relief! What a delight was it to him to "strengthen your weak hands, and confirm your feeble knees, and to say to your fearful hearts, Be strong, fear not, your God will come and save you!" You, "afflicted and tossed with tempest, and not comforted," whatever your distresses were, surely you have lost a brother, "a friend that sticks closer than a brother."

But though his benevolent heart can no more expand towards you, "has your Lord forgotten to be gracious? Has Jesus shut up his tender mercies?" No! to him you may still carry your complaints: he bids the weary and heavy-laden to come unto him: he "has received gifts," not for the indigent only, but "for the rebellious." Nor shall one of you be "sent empty away." Whom did he ever dismiss, in the days of his flesh, without granting to him the blessing he desired? So now, if you will go unto him, he "will satiate every weary soul, and replenish every sorrowful soul." He "will give you beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, that God may be glorified!"

***~~The last observation we proposed to make, was that Christ is the same in his fidelity to his promises—~~***

We have before shown that he led his people through the wilderness: he had promised to cast out all their enemies, and to give them "a land flowing with milk and honey." And behold, Joshua, at the close of a long life, and after an experience of many years, could make this appeal to all Israel: "You know in all your hearts, [Joshua 23:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 23.14), and in all your souls, that not one thing has failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spoke concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing has failed thereof."

The same fidelity did Jesus manifest, while he sojourned upon earth. The Father had committed to him a chosen people to keep: and Jesus with his dying breath could say, "Those whom you gave me I have kept, and none of them is lost." He promised to his disconsolate disciples, that he would pour out his Spirit upon them; and that the Comforter, whom he would send, would far more than compensate for the loss of his bodily presence: and how speedily did he perform his promise!

Thus, in every succeeding age, have his people found him faithful. He has "given exceeding great and precious promises" to his Church, not one jot or tittle of which have ever failed. Those who have rested on his word, have never been disappointed. Enthusiasts indeed, who have put their own vain conceits in the place of his word, and have presumed to call their own feelings or imaginations by the sacred appellation of a promise, have often met with disappointments; nor can they reasonably expect anything else. But those who rest upon the clear promises of the Gospel, and wait for the accomplishment of them to their own souls, "shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end."

Let any creature upon earth "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," and shall he be left wholly destitute with respect to temporal comforts? No! he perhaps may be severely tried for a season; but before long he shall have "all needful things added unto him."

Let a lost sinner "whose sins have been of a scarlet or crimson dye," make application to the Lord for mercy; and shall he ever be cast out? No, provided he comes simply trusting in the Savior's righteousness.

Let any seek deliverance from the snares of Satan, by whom he has been led captive at his will; and shall he be left in bondage to his lusts? Most surely not, if he will rely on Him who has said, "Sin shall not have dominion over you, because you are not under the law, but under grace."

Now it may be, that many of you have been promising yourselves much spiritual, perhaps also some temporal, advantage, from your deceased minister. And behold! in an instant, all your hopes are blasted. The *creature*, though so excellent, proves in this respect but a broken reed. But if you will look to Christ, you cannot raise your expectations too high: he is the same yesterday, today, and forever. You may rely on him, for body and for soul, for time and for eternity: he will be to you a "sun and a shield; he will give you both grace and glory; nor will he withhold any good thing from those who walk uprightly." If he sees it necessary that for a season you would be "in heaviness through manifold temptations," he will make your trials to work for good; and "your light and momentary afflictions shall work out for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Only commit your souls to him in well-doing, and he will "keep you by his Almighty power, through faith, unto salvation."

***~~In the improvement which we would make of this subject—~~***

We beg permission once more to notice the words that immediately precede the text, "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith, [Hebrews 13:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.7)" We may appear indeed, in this, to draw your attention from Christ, and to fix it on the creature. But we shall still keep in view our main subject; and at once consult:  
the scope of the context,  
the peculiarity of this occasion,  
and the feelings of your hearts.

First then, Remember him who has had the rule over you, and has preached unto you the Word of God. Surely I need not say much to enforce this part of the exhortation: he is deeply engraved on your hearts, nor will the remembrance of him be soon effaced from your minds. Many of you would have "even plucked out your own eyes and have given them unto him," if by so doing you could have conferred upon him any essential benefit. Yes, I doubt not, there are many in this assembly that would gladly, very gladly, have laid down their lives in his stead, that so great a blessing as he was, might yet have been continued to the Church of God. It cannot be but that the *poor*must long remember their generous and constant benefactor. Many of the *children*too, I trust, whom he so delighted to instruct, will remember him to the last period of their lives. Above all, the *people* who looked up to him as their spiritual father, to whom they owed their own souls, will bear him in remembrance. They will never forget "how holily, justly, and unblamably he conducted himself among them," and how "he exhorted and comforted and charged every one of them, as a father does his children, that they would walk worthy of God, who has called them unto his kingdom and glory!" Deservedly will his name be reverenced in this place for ages; for "he was a burning and a shining light;" and had so uniformly persisted in well-doing, that he had utterly "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men," and made religion respectable in the eyes of the most ungodly.

Let me proceed then in the next place to say, "Imitate his faith." What his faith was, you well know. Christ was the one foundation of all his hopes. He desired "to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, but that which is by faith in Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." And as he trusted in no other for his own salvation, so he preached no other among you. He had "determined, like Paul, to know nothing among you but Jesus Christ, and him crucified." Every discourse he preached tended immediately or remotely to glorify Christ among you. If he preached the law, it was that, as a schoolmaster, it might lead you to Christ. If he insisted upon obedience, it was, that you might "glorify Christ by your bodies and your spirits which are Christ's." In short, Christ was, as well in his ministrations as in the inspired writings, "the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, the first and the last!"

Were he preaching to you at this moment, I am persuaded he would have no other theme; yes, if to the end of the world he were continued to preach unto you, you would hear of nothing but Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever! It was this which made his ministry so acceptable unto you. It was this which God rendered useful to the conversion and consolation of multitudes among you. By faith in Christ he lived, and in faith in Christ he died. Almost the last words he uttered were these, "Weep not for me; I am very happy, I die in the faith of the Lord Jesus."

I have been anticipated in one remarkable circumstance which I had intended to mention to you; and I am unwilling to omit it now, because there may be some here who were not present this morning. Indeed it is so applicable to my subject, and so illustrative of the character of your dear pastor, that I may well be excused if I repeat what you have already heard.

That blessed man, though he possessed a very considerable share of human learning, valued no book in comparison with the Scriptures: when therefore he found his dissolution approaching, he desired his dear wife to read a portion of the Word of God: she immediately read to him, first the 23nd Psalm, and afterwards the 8th chapter of Proverbs. In the last, verse but one of that chapter, she came to these words, "Whoever finds me, finds life, and shall obtain favor of the Lord." Immediately, without waiting for her to conclude the chapter, he cried, "Stop, stop! now shut the book; that is enough for me." Blessed man! he had sweetly experienced the truth of those words; he had found life in Christ Jesus; he had obtained favor of the Lord; and he knew that he was going to dwell with his Lord forever! Such was his faith. He held fast Christ as his "wisdom, his righteousness, his sanctification, and his complete redemption." He made "Christ his all, and in all."

But while he trusted in Christ alone for his justification before God, no man living ever more forcibly inculcated the necessity of good works, or, I may truly add, practiced them with more delight. He was also a firm friend to the Established Church, and inculcated on all occasions submission to the constituted authorities of this kingdom. He considered obedience to the powers that be, as an essential part of his duty to God. He looked upon earthly governors as ministers ordained of God; and inculcated obedience to them as a duty, "not merely for wrath, but also for conscience sake."

As then you have been followers of his faith and practice while living, so be imitators of him now that he is withdrawn from you: "be followers of him, as he was of Christ." And be careful, "not to be carried about with divers and strange doctrines," but "hold fast what you have received, that no man take your crown." If there be any here, who have never yet been "partakers of the like precious faith with him," O that I might this day prevail with them to "become obedient to the faith!"

My dear brethren, you will assuredly find that the only means of holiness in life, or of peace in death, or of glory in eternity—is, the knowledge of Christ! "There is no other name under Heaven given among men whereby we can be saved" from sin and misery in this world, or from everlasting destruction in the world to come! There is no other name, I say, but the name of Jesus Christ. I must therefore entreat you now to reflect on those things which hitherto you have heard without effect; and I pray God, that the seed, which has lain buried in the earth, may spring up speedily, and bring forth fruit a hundred-fold.

I add now in the last place, "Consider the end of your departed minister's conduct." You have heard how peaceful and resigned he was in the prospect of death, and what an assured and glorious hope of immortality he enjoyed. "Mark the perfect man," says David, "and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace:" this you have seen verified in him. But carry your thoughts a little further, and follow him within the veil. Behold him:  
united to that blessed assembly of saints and angels,  
freed from the bondage of corruption,  
arrayed in the unspotted robe of his Redeemer's righteousness,  
crowned with a royal diadem,  
seated on a throne of glory,  
tuning his golden harp, and with a voice as loud and as melodious as any saint in Heaven, singing, "Salvation to God and to the Lamb!"

Is there so much as one of you that can think of this, and not exclaim, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!"

Let the thought of these things, my brethren, encourage you to persevere. *The conflict cannot be very long; but how glorious the triumph!*Consider this, I beseech you; that you "may fight the good fight of faith, and behave like men." Go on, "strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus;" and doubt not but that you shall find the grace of Christ as sufficient for you as it has been for him; and that what Christ has been to others in former ages, he will be to you, the same yesterday, today, and for ever!

***~~#2345~~***

***~~CAUTION AGAINST FALSE DOCTRINES~~***

***~~[Hebrews 13:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.9)~~***

"Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by ceremonial foods, which are of no value to those who eat them."

Truth lies not on the surface, but must be sought after with diligence. This is true in every science; but most of all true in religion.

In all other sciences, only intellectual powers are required. In religion, there must be integrity of heart, and a sincere desire to practice, as well as to know, the will of God.

To other knowledge there is no obstruction from within: if only there be a sufficiency of information and of capacity to comprehend it, truth will make its way into the mind of those who seek it. But to the progress of religious truth there are many obstacles in the heart of man; many prejudices, many passions, many interests present a barrier to obstruct its entrance into the soul: and these must be in a great measure removed, before the light of truth can break through the clouds which intercept its rays.

Yet in one respect religious truth is of easier attainment than any other: for to the acquisition of it great intellectual powers are not necessary: nor is special learning necessary. All that is needed is a humble, teachable spirit, that will seek instruction from God, and receive with child-like simplicity all that God has spoken in his word. Such a one, provided he seeks with diligence, and with a determination of heart to fulfill the will of God as far as he can learn it, will assuredly be guided into all truth.

But that very simplicity of mind which is necessary to the attainment of truth, subjects a person, if he is not much upon his guard, to be imposed upon by those, who, "by fair speeches, deceive the hearts of the simple." Against such teachers Paul felt it necessary to caution his converts frequently, [Romans 16:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.17-18); since, though agents only of the prince of darkness, they put on the appearance of angels of light, [2 Corinthians 11:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.13-15). Against such he here cautions the Hebrew Christians, entreating them to bear in mind what they had been taught by those who had been over them in the Lord, and not to allow themselves to be turned aside from the truth which they had received.

In the words here addressed to them, we see,

***~~I. A caution given—~~***

There were, even in the apostolic age, "many vain-talkers and deceivers, and especially among the circumcision, who by their subtle disputations subverted whole houses, [Titus 1:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 1.10-11)," and "caused the way of truth to be evil spoken of, [2 Peter 2:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.1-3)."

In this day likewise there are not lacking teachers of a similar description, who bring forward some favorite notions of their own, "in order to draw away disciples after them, [Acts 20:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.29-30)." Against these we must at all times be on our guard, lest at any time we be "carried away":

***~~1. By legal doctrines—~~***

It was against these more particularly that the Apostle here cautioned the Hebrews. The great scope of his epistle was to show that the rites and ceremonies, on which the Jews laid so great a stress, were abrogated, and superseded by a better dispensation. And the strange doctrines hinted at in the text are put in immediate connection with "foods, (such as were enjoined or prohibited under the Mosaic dispensation,) which had not profited those who had been occupied therein." To such an extent were the ceremonies of the law insisted on by some, that they affirmed that no one could be saved without a strict observance of them, [Acts 15:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 15.1). [Colossians 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.16). Thus they perverted the Gospel of Christ, by uniting with the blood of Christ another ground of dependence for our justification before God, [Galatians 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.7).

And though Judaism is not now insisted on as it then was, *there is the same disposition in men to combine something of their own with faith in Christ, as a joint ground of their hope*. Men are still as averse as ever to a free salvation that is all of grace. They would have it to be in some measure "of works;" not aware, that it must be wholly either of works, or of grace, [Romans 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.4); [Romans 11:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.6). They do not see that the very instant any works of ours are admitted as meriting salvation, either in whole or in part, salvation is no more of grace, and man has to all eternity a ground of boasting before God, [Romans 3:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.27).

Be on your guard then that you be not carried away by such legal statements as too commonly prevail even in the present enlightened age: for it is not necessary to go to Papists in order to hear such doctrines: they are still heard among us, notwithstanding this error formed the chief ground of our separation from the Church of Rome, and of our *protesting*against their fatal heresies. But know that, if you add anything to the work of Christ as a joint ground of your hope, you make void the Gospel of Christ, and must inevitably and eternally perish! [Romans 9:30-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.30-33) and [Galatians 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.2); [Galatians 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.4).

***~~2. By Antinomian doctrines—~~***

To these also there is a reference in the preceding context. Many converts, and especially from among the Gentiles, had but very imperfect views of that holiness which the Gospel enjoins. The great degree of criminality which attaches to fornication and adultery, was, through the influence of opinions imbibed in their Gentile state, but indistinctly seen: and hence, for the purpose of rectifying their views, the Apostle shows them, that, though marriage was honorable in all, having been ordained by God himself, that species of sin which they were disposed to justify, was most dishonorable, and most offensive in the sight of God, "who would judge both adulterers and the immoral" with the utmost severity, verse 4. Many indeed would plead for such indulgences; as we see in the Ephesian Church: but Paul, warning the Ephesian converts, says, "Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things comes the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience! [Ephesians 5:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.5-6). [Revelation 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.14); [Revelation 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.20)."

Thus at this time also there are persons who teach, that the law is not a rule of life to believers; and that Christ's righteousness being perfect, they have a sanctification in him, and need not seek to have any sanctification in their own souls and lives. From a professed zeal for the honor of Christ, they would set aside all need of personal holiness, and bring men to their heavenly inheritance without putting them to the trouble of seeking a fitness for it.

But this is an awful delusion. It is very specious indeed, because it pretends to exalt the honor of Christ: but, in reality, it greatly dishonors him, inasmuch as it makes him, not a friend of sinners, but of sin; which, if unmortified and unsubdued, would incapacitate the sinner for the enjoyment of Heaven, even if he were admitted there, [Revelation 21:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.27).

But be on your guard against this doctrine also, a doctrine foreign to the whole tenor of Scripture, from the beginning to the end; a doctrine most injurious to God's honor, directly repugnant to the great end for which Christ came into the world; (which was "to save his people from their sins, [Matthew 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 1.21);") and utterly subversive of the whole work of the Spirit in the souls of men, [Ezekiel 36:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.25-27). [1 Peter 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.2). Whatever stress we may lay on the work of Christ, (and we cannot possibly rely too much or too simply upon it for our justification before God,) it is an unalterable truth, that "without holiness, (real, personal, universal holiness,) no man shall see the Lord, [Hebrews 12:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.14)."

***~~3. By erroneous doctrines of whatever kind—~~***

It were endless to attempt to enumerate all the heresies which have arisen, and are yet found in the Christian Church. Some are entirely subversive of Christianity itself, being nothing less than "a denial of the Lord who bought us, Jude verse 3." Others are founded upon some truth which is carried to excess, and held to the exclusion of other truths which are equally important in their place. Of this kind are the tenets of those who fiercely contend for human systems, whether Calvinistic or Arminian, taking only partial views of divine truth, and wresting every passage of Scripture which seems to militate against their favorite scheme. The truth is, that the way of salvation, if we will only submit to be taught of God, is very plain and simple: it is all comprehended in these few words, "Faith working by love." But if, instead of taking the plain declarations of Scripture for our guide, we will refine upon them, and invent modes of speaking which are widely different from them, and insist upon our own subtleties as if they were the very Word of God himself—then it is no wonder that heresies arise, and divisions ensue. But against all dogmas of man's invention we would be on our guard. In order to our preservation from them, we have in our text,

***~~II. An antidote recommended—~~***

We should seek to be "established with grace;" or, as that expression imports, we should be established in the Gospel; (for that is the grace to which Jewish ceremonies are opposed, and it is " the grace wherein we stand, [Romans 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.2).")

***~~1. As a revelation of grace in itself—~~***

It is so; it is so altogether.

The whole plan, as devised by Almighty God, was formed in his eternal counsels without any reference to human merit, or to any recompense which the whole universe could ever confer.

It was undertaken by the Son, purely from his own love and mercy, to die in the place of sinners, and to expiate their guilt by his own blood.

The Holy Spirit also engaged to apply that redemption to God's chosen people, and to bring them to the possession of all its blessings by his sovereign and all-sufficient grace.

All was the free gift of God to man: and there is not a Christian in the universe who must not say, "By the grace of God I am what I am!"

Now to be established in these views is a grand preservative against error of every kind: and a man well grounded in them is incapable of being moved by all the artifices of the most subtle deceivers. Tell the man that he does not deserve the wrath of God; or that he may save himself by the merit of his works; or that, if he cannot save himself entirely, he may in part, by some good works and righteousness of his own; you may perplex him perhaps, especially if he is unaccustomed to weigh the arguments of sophists; but you can no more convince him, than you can persuade him that he is an angel, or that he is able to create a world. He has within himself the witness of the truths which he maintains; and as complete a consciousness of his need of the Gospel, and of its suitableness to his necessities, as he has of his need of food for his body, and of the suitableness of food to recruit his strength.

Hence, as a security against their being beguiled by enticing words, the Apostle says to the Colossian Church, "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 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.4); [Colossians 2:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.6-7)."

***~~2. As a dispensation of grace to the soul—~~***

The same covenant which says, "I will forgive their iniquity, and their sins will I remember no more," says, "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, [Jeremiah 31:33-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.33-34). [Hebrews 10:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.16-17)." It even engages to do this so effectually, that, notwithstanding all their outward temptations and inward corruptions, they shall never finally depart from God, [Jeremiah 32:38-41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 32.38-41). In this light then should the Gospel be viewed, namely, as a provision for the "turning of men, not only from darkness unto light, but from the power of Satan unto God." For this end is "all fullness of grace treasured up in Christ," that "out of it all his people might receive," and that "the grace so conferred may be sufficient for them."

Now if once we are established in this view of the Gospel, we may bid defiance to all the sophistries that would relax our obligation to holiness. We shall see that holiness is the grand constituent of salvation, inasmuch as it is the restoration of God's image to the soul, even of that image which alone can fit us for the enjoyment of his presence, and without which we must remain everlasting objects of his utter abhorrence. Indeed, if once we are established in this grace, all the subtleties of controversialists will lose their power. We shall see that a perfect conformity to God's likeness is the only thing which we need to be concerned about; and the only end for which even the purest principles are of any value. This well fixed in the mind, our walk will be steadfast; nor, however violent the assaults of heretics may be upon us, shall any of them prevail to "carry us away."

We are yet further called to notice,

***~~III. The recommendation enforced—~~***

"It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace." Yes truly, "it is a good thing," for it brings:

***~~1. Peace into the soul—~~***

Those who are tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine, or who are entering deeply into controversies of any kind, are for the most part strangers to peace. They are distracted and disquieted, and frequently "filled with envy, and strife, and railings, and evil surmisings," and all manner of unhallowed dispositions, [1 Timothy 4:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 4.3-5). *Their very contentions are for the most part not so much for truth, as for victory*.

But the man whose heart is established with grace, dwells, as it were, in the higher regions of the air, where he is not subject to those storms and tempests which agitate our lower world. His mind is kept in perfect peace, because it is fixed, trusting in the Lord. *He is content to be ignorant of things which God has not revealed; and to let people entertain different opinions from himself on matters of doubtful disputation*. He knows assuredly, that, while his faith in Christ is firm and operative, he cannot materially err; and that "he shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end."

***~~2. Stability into the life and conduct—~~***

*He leaves others to enter into controversies; he is concerned only about the maintenance of the divine life in his soul.*Others are espousing different opinions, and joining with different parties; and some are running the whole round of Christian profession, one day holding communion with one Church or people, and another day anathematizing them as heretics and fanatics.

But the Christian who is established with grace, moves on in one even tenor, and makes his profiting daily to appear. He grows in grace, he makes visible attainments in holiness, "he runs with patience the race that is set before him." Like the sun in its course, he diffuses blessings all around him: and, having finished his course, he sets, to rise in another hemisphere, where he shall shine with undiminished luster for ever and ever! [Matthew 13:43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.43).

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Do not be ignorant of the Gospel of Christ—~~***

It is quite a mistake to imagine that, because there is a great diversity of sentiment upon some points, there is nothing certain: for on the points which are of fundamental importance, all true Christians are agreed. They are all agreed:

1. that we are guilty, helpless, and undone;

2. that it is in and through the Lord Jesus Christ alone that any human being can be saved;

3. that we need his righteousness to justify us, and his grace to sanctify our corrupt nature;

4. that whatever attainments in holiness any man may reach, he will still be indebted to the free, and sovereign, and undeserved grace of God for all from first to last!

Get the knowledge, the practical knowledge of this; and all will be well. You may clearly see that much human learning is not necessary for this: on the contrary, human learning, if unsanctified, is rather an impediment to this, especially If it is relied upon, as it too often is, as a sufficient instructor, and a safe guide, [1 Corinthians 1:18-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.18-21). There is no safe guide but the Holy Spirit: and "he often reveals unto babes and sucklings the things which are hidden from the wise and prudent, [Matthew 11:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.25)." *The way to seek divine knowledge, is to study the Holy Scriptures with humility and prayer, and in dependence on the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit*, [Proverbs 2:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 2.1-6); and if you do so study them, you shall "be guided into all truth," and "be made wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus."

**2. Do not be satisfied with indistinct and shallow views of** **the Gospel—**

There are in the Gospel "heights and depths" that can never be explored. We may not indeed have different truths brought to our view: but the same truths will be brought with ten-fold clearness and power to the soul. It is the same sun which lights us amidst the gloom of winter, and in the height of summer: but how different are the sensations it excites, and the effects it produces! Yet of these feelings and these effects the peasant is as sensible as the greatest monarch upon earth. Know then your privilege, every one of you, and seek the enjoyment of it: and let every one of you labor and pray, that "his light be as that of the sun, which shines more and more unto the perfect day, [Proverbs 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 4.18)."

***~~#2346~~***

***~~THE CHRISTIAN'S ALTAR~~***

***~~[Hebrews 13:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.10)~~***

"We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat."

Christianity itself is simple, comprising two points:

1. Our fall in Adam.

2. Our recovery by Christ.

Yet it admits of an endless diversity of statement and illustration. The Mosaic institutions especially, which were intended to shadow forth the Gospel, supply an inexhaustible fund of observation for the elucidation of it. The Jews gloried in their law, and were with great difficulty brought to renounce their reliance on it for salvation. But from the law itself we borrow those very illustrations which place in the strongest possible view the superiority of the Gospel. Their altar, for instance, was their great medium of access to, and of communion with God. But the Apostle, guarding them against an undue respect to outward observances, tells them, that we, we Christians, have an altar far superior to theirs, "an altar, of which those who serve the tabernacle, have no right to eat."

From these words, I shall take occasion to show:

***~~I. The pre-eminence which we, under the Gospel dispensation, enjoy—~~***

The Jews had two altars; the altar of incense, and the altar of burned-offering. It is of this latter alone that we shall have any occasion to speak at this time. On this altar they offered all their sacrifices; certain portions of which were consumed upon the altar, and the remainder was left for the subsistence of the priests, [Numbers 18:8-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 18.8-19). [1 Corinthians 9:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 9.13); on which account "they had no inheritance in Israel, seeing that the Lord was their inheritance, [Numbers 18:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 18.20-21)."

On some occasions, particularly that of the peace-offering, the offerers themselves also partook, and had by far the larger share, [Leviticus 7:11-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 7.11-21). But when any sacrifice, the *blood*of which was carried within the veil, was offered, no one was allowed to eat of that: it was wholly burned outside the camp, while the tabernacle was standing; and outside the city, when the temple was built, [Leviticus 6:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 6.30); [Leviticus 16:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 16.27); and, in order to fulfill this type, our blessed Lord, who offered himself a sacrifice for the sins of the world, suffered outside the gates of Jerusalem, verse 11, 12.

Now, his blood was carried within the veil; he himself, as our High-priest, bearing it there for us, [Hebrews 9:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.11-12). Yet of his sacrifice may we all partake, provided we truly believe in him: but to those who yet serve the Jewish tabernacle, is all participation of this altar forbidden: the altar and the provision derived from it are the exclusive portion of those who believe in Christ.

Now then the question arises, "Why cannot those who serve the Jewish tabernacle, partake of this altar?" The answer is plain: they are conversant only with shadows, now that the substance is come; and by adhering to their ritual observances, prove to demonstration, that they do not believe in Him, who, by the sacrifice of himself, has fulfilled and abrogated them all. Even under the Jewish dispensation, the offerers derived no spiritual benefit from their sacrifices, any further than they looked through those sacrifices to Christ. How then can they derive any benefit from Christ, whom they pertinaciously reject?

Conceive, for a moment, what those who partook of the Jewish altar professed. They professed, that they were sinners, deserving of God's righteous indignation: that they desired reconciliation with their offended God (for "they must bring their offerings with their own hands, [Leviticus 7:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 7.29-30)."): they must also "lay their hands upon the head of their sacrifice," to show that they transferred their guilt to him, [Leviticus 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.4); [Leviticus 4:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.15); [Leviticus 4:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.24); [Leviticus 4:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.33). It was in the due observance of these rites that they became partakers of the altar: and if they had neglected their duty in these respects, they would have derived no benefit from the altar, or from the sacrifices that were offered upon it.

Now these are the very things which are to be done by us under the New Testament dispensation. We must view the Lord Jesus Christ as the appointed Sacrifice; and bring him to the altar, and transfer our sins to his sacred head, and found all our hopes of acceptance on him alone. But this is what a Jew, who is yet resting on the observance of his legal ceremonies, can never do; and, consequently, he can never, while continuing in his error, partake of the benefits of the Gospel salvation. Our blessed Lord has declared this in the plainest terms: "If you believe not that I am He, you shall die in your sins!"

Seeing, then, that we Christians exclusively enjoy this high privilege, let us contemplate:

***~~II. The duties arising from it—~~***

In fact, this is the proper foundation of all our duties: for, though it is true that we are bound to serve God as our Creator, yet, under the Christian dispensation, we would receive a still higher impulse from all the wonders of redemption: "Being bought with a price, we should glorify God with our bodies and our spirits, which are his, [1 Corinthians 6:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.20)." But, to speak more particularly, have we access to this altar?

***~~1. Let us live upon that altar—~~***

The priests subsisted altogether on the provisions which were derived from the altar. Now we all, if we believe in Christ, are "kings and priests unto God:" there is no difference in this respect between male and female; all are "a royal priesthood;" and all are entitled equally to a full participation of the Redeemer's sacrifice: "The life which we now live in the flesh, we are to live altogether 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)." There must be no depending on our works. While living upon Christ, we must "show forth our faith by our works;" but our works must proceed from life already received, and by strength derived from Christ. It is *from*life, and not *for*life, that all our works must be performed.

***~~2. Let us present all our offerings upon it—~~***

There was nothing presented to God, except the first-fruits, [Leviticus 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 2.12), without a memorial of it being burned upon the altar. The part which was there consumed was God's share; of which he, as it were, partook with the offerer: from whence it is called "the food of the offering made by fire unto the Lord, [Leviticus 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 3.11)."

Now, whatever we have to offer unto God, our prayers, our praises, our alms, verse 15, 16, our whole selves, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1), we must lay it upon that altar. Never can it ascend up to God as a sweet savor, unless it is laid upon Christ, and ascend from him inflamed with fire that came down from Heaven. "It is the altar that sanctifies our every gift, [Matthew 23:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 23.19);" and hence Peter gives us this plain direction, "To whom coming," that is, coming to Christ as "the living foundation-stone" of God's spiritual temple, "you also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ, [1 Peter 2:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.4-5)." O! let us ever remember, that neither our persons nor our services can ever be accepted by God in any other way than this.

***~~3. Let us invite the whole world to a participation of it—~~***

There is no bar to our admission to it, but unbelief. The very murderers of our Lord were invited to accept the benefits of our Lord's sacrifice. It matters not whether we have been Jews or Gentiles; if only we come to Christ, we shall find acceptance through him: for he has told us that "none shall ever be cast out who come unto God by him." Let us proclaim this to the very ends of the earth, that "from the rising of the sun, even to the going down of the same, God's name may be great among the Gentiles; that in every place incense may be offered to him, and a pure offering, [Malachi 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 1.11);" and that "all flesh may see the salvation of God, [Luke 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 3.6)."

***~~Let me now address a few words,~~***

***~~1. To those who place an undue reliance on these advantages—~~***

Many imagine, that because "they have access to God through Christ, [Ephesians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.18)," they shall, of necessity, find acceptance with God. But there must be a suitableness in the sacrifices which we offer to him. What if men had offered to God "the torn, the lame, the sick; would God have accepted it at their hands? [Malachi 1:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 1.13-14)." No! nor will he accept us, if we do not offer to him such sacrifices as he demands: they must be "holy, if we would have them acceptable, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1)." There must be in us a penitent and contrite spirit, [Psalm 51:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.17); and if this be lacking, our every sacrifice will be abhorred: "He who kills an ox, will be as if he slew a man; and he who sacrifices a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; and he who offers an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood, [Isaiah 66:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.2-3)." Let us then examine well our motives, our principles, our manner of drawing near to God; that He who searches the heart, and to whom the inmost recesses of it are open, [Hebrews 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.13). The sacrifices were not only flayed, but cut down the back-bone, to be inspected, may approve of us as "Israelites indeed, in whom is no deceit."

***~~2. To those who are endeavoring to improve them aright—~~***

I have said that your offerings must be holy. But be not therefore discouraged; as though you, on account of your imperfections, could never find acceptance with God: for "God knows whereof you are made, and remembers that you are but dust:" and, as under the law, if a man were poor, and unable to bring a lamb for a trespass-offering, God permitted him to bring two turtle-doves, or two young pigeons, "such as he could get," (repeating it no less than four times, that he might bring such as he could get, [Leviticus 14:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 14.22); [Leviticus 14:30-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 14.30-32).) Yes, if for a free-will offering he condescended to accept even "leavened bread, [Leviticus 7:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 7.13)," and a mutilated beast, [Leviticus 22:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 22.21-23), say, who among you needs to be discouraged?

Nay, I will even ask, who among you has sincerely, however imperfectly, offered himself up to God, and not found some token of his acceptance, and some manifestations of his love, in his own soul? Doubtless, as the Levites, when dedicating themselves to the Lord, were first sprinkled with the water of purifying, and then shaved their flesh, and washed their clothes, and then offered their sacrifice, [Numbers 8:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 8.7-8); [Numbers 8:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 8.21); so should you, as far as possible, put off the old man, and put on the new, while you are coming to Christ for pardon and acceptance. But for real efficiency in holiness, this mode must be reversed—you must first lay hold on his promises of mercy, and then "cleanse yourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God, [2 Corinthians 7:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.1)."

Nevertheless, I still ask, have you not found God ever ready to hear and to accept your prayers? It is remarkable, that though a peace-offering was to be eaten on the day that it was presented, yet, if it were offered as a free-will offering in consequence of a vow, it might be feasted upon by the offerer both on that day and on the day following; though by no means on the third day, [Leviticus 7:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 7.15-16). So I will ask, whether the savor of your religious exercises has not often abode upon your soul long after the hour in which they were presented unto God? If it continues not a third day, it is to teach you, that you are not to live upon your frames and feelings, but to be continually presenting yourselves to God afresh. Take then this encouragement from the Lord; and let the fire never go out upon your altar, and the altar never lack a sacrifice to ascend up with a fragrance of a sweet smell before your God, [Ephesians 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.2).

***~~#2347~~***

***~~THE BURNT-SACRIFICES TYPICAL OF CHRIST~~***

***~~[Hebrews 13:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.11-13)~~***

"The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore."

SUCH is the proneness of men to superstition, that they need to watch with care, lest, after having once shaken off its fetters, they are again subjected to its dominion. The Hebrew Christians in particular were liable to be drawn aside from the simplicity of the Gospel: their fond attachment to the law of Moses, seconded by the subtle arguments of Judaizing teachers, exposed them to continual danger.

Hence the inspired author of this epistle cautioned them against returning to their former bondage. And, lest they would be led to think, that by renouncing the law of Moses, they deprived themselves of the blessings which were procured by their sacrifices, he tells them, that this was by no means the case; yes, that, on the contrary, they were partakers of a better altar, to which the adherents to Judaism had no access; and that the very ordinances in which the Jews trusted, pointed out this truth in a clear and convincing manner; for not even the high-priest himself was permitted to eat of the sacrifices whose blood he had carried within the veil. Whereas every true Christian was permitted to eat of that sacrifice which alone could atone for sin; and therefore, so far from there being any necessity for them to revert to Judaism in order to partake of the Jewish sacrifices, the Jews themselves must be converted to Christianity in order to obtain the full benefit even of those sacrifices which they themselves had offered. This seems to be the true scope of the passage as connected with the context.

To illustrate this more fully, we shall point out,

***~~I. The correspondence between the death of Christ, and the ordinances whereby it was prefigured—~~***

The most minute particulars of the death of Christ were typified under the law, but we shall fix our attention at present on that only which is specified in the text.

***~~The sacrifices on the great day of annual expiation were to be burned outside the camp—~~***

The sacrifices on the great day of atonement were distinguished far above all others, and accompanied with circumstances of peculiar solemnity. Their blood was carried within the veil, and sprinkled upon the mercy-seat, as the means of propitiating the incensed Deity, and of obtaining pardon for the sins committed by the whole nation through the preceding year. A part of most other sacrifices belonged to the priest who offered them: but of this sacrifice, not the smallest portion was to be preserved for the use of man: all, except the fat which was consumed upon the altar, was carried outside the camp (in later ages, outside the city of Jerusalem) to be destroyed by fire, [Leviticus 6:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 6.30); [Leviticus 16:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 16.27). *Probably this was intended to exhibit God's indignation against sin, and to show how utterly they must be consumed by the fire of his wrath*.

But the words before us reflect a light on this ordinance, which it is of great importance to observe. The burning of the whole of these sacrifices showed that no legal services whatever could entitle a person to partake of them: not even the high-priest himself, who carried their blood within the veil, had any privilege beyond the poorest and basest of the people. They could obtain a saving interest in them only by faith; nor could he taste of them in any other way: though his services were the most sacred, and his access to God far more intimate than any other person, or even he himself at any other period, could enjoy—yet had he no more part in this atonement than every other person might have by the exercise of faith.

Consequently those who, under the Christian dispensation, would trust in the sacrifice of Christ, would participate in the benefits, from which the high-priest himself would be excluded, if he rested in the outward services without looking through them to the great, the true atonement.

***~~Agreeably to this typical ordinance, our Lord suffered outside the gate of Jerusalem—~~***

The death of Christ was that which the annual sacrifices typically represented. He died for sin, and, after he had offered himself upon the cross, entered into Heaven itself with his own blood, there to present it before the Father on our behalf: and it was by this means that he "sanctified," or consecrated to himself, a peculiar people, who would for ever enjoy the virtue of his atonement.

But, in order that his death might produce the full effect, it was necessary that it would be conformed in every respect to the ordinances whereby it had been prefigured. Hence it was accomplished "outside the gate" of Jerusalem; so strictly did it accord with the most minute particulars that had been before determined in the Divine counsels.

Whether there was any mystery couched under this event, we cannot absolutely determine. We would not indeed have discerned perhaps anything particular in it, if light had not been thrown upon it by an inspired writer. But, as we are certain that this event was a completion of the pre-existing ordinance, it is not improbable that it might have some further signification. While it shows us to what a degree "Christ became a curse for us," it may also intimate, that the virtue of his sacrifice was not to be confined to those who were within the pale of the Jewish Church, but rather to extend to those who were without it, even to the whole Gentile world.

The exhortation, which the Apostle grounds upon these circumstances, leads us to point out,

***~~II. The conformity which Christians also are to bear, both to the law and to him who fulfilled it—~~***

Doubtless, everything which Christ has done for us, entails on us an obligation to conform ourselves to his mind and will.

But the circumstances before considered, suggest to us some appropriate and important duties:

***~~1. We must renounce all legal hopes, that we may depend on Christ alone—~~***

The particular injunction to go forth to Christ outside the camp, intimates, that we must turn our back upon all the legal services, and trust alone in that sacrifice which he offered outside the gate. The importance of this observation would be more strongly felt by a Hebrew convert, who was assailed with arguments respecting the obligations of the Mosaic law.

But it is, in reality, no less important to us: for, if we do not trust in the blood of bulls and goats, we are ever ready to substitute something in the place of Jesus, as the ground of our confidence. But services, of whatever kind, whether *ceremonial*or *moral*, must be renounced in point of dependence. They must not even be blended in any degree with the atonement of Christ, as though the performance of them could procure a saving interest in this. We must be "justified by his blood," and by that alone. If Paul himself desired to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, [Philippians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.9), much more must we. Let us remember then what, not the Gospel only, but even the law itself, speaks to us on this subject; and let us look for a participation in the great Sacrifice, not for, or by our works, but by faith alone.

***~~2. We must forsake all worldly lusts, that we may walk with Christ—~~***

What a perfect deadness to the world did Jesus manifest, when he went forth to the place of execution, giving up himself to that accursed death, from which he could have been so easily delivered! *The world had nothing that could fascinate him: its cares, its pleasures, its honors, its society—were all alike indifferent to him.*He had only one wish—to fulfill his Father's will, and finish the work he had been commissioned to perform. In turning his back on that devoted city, he felt no regret, except indeed for the blindness and hardness of the people's hearts.

Thus must we come out of the world which lies in wickedness: we must be "crucified to the world, and the world must be crucified to us, [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.14)." "All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," must be abandoned as objects of indifference, as objects of abhorrence. The things that are dearest to flesh and blood, if they stand at all in competition with Christ, are to be hated and forsaken! Our former companions, if they will not travel with us in the heavenly road, are to be left behind; for "what communion has light with darkness, or a believer with an unbeliever? Therefore, says God: Come out from among them, and be separate, [2 Corinthians 6:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.15); [2 Corinthians 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.17)." Even father and mother, and wife and children, yes, and our own lives also, are to be of no account with us, [Luke 14:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.26), if they interfere with our duty to God, or retard the execution of his commands.

***~~3. We must submit to all indignities, that we may resemble Christ—~~***

This is the principal point to which the text refers. Jesus, when carrying his cross from the city to Mount Calvary, was an object of universal execration. Thus, in a measure, must we also be, if we will be his disciples. The world will hate, revile, and persecute us, as soon as ever we become his faithful adherents. "If they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, so will they those of his household." But we must not be deterred from our duty by these things: we must "follow our Lord outside the camp, not only bearing his reproach," but esteeming it our riches! [Hebrews 11:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.26), and rejoicing that we are counted worthy to suffer shame for his sake! [Acts 5:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.41).

He has told us beforehand, that "in the world we shall have tribulation," and that, in proof of our attachment to him, we must "take up our cross daily and follow him." Expecting this therefore, we must "count the cost;" that, if we are treated "as the filth of the world and the off-scouring of all things," we may, like him, "endure the cross and despise the shame, [Hebrews 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.2)." Nor would it ever seem hard to us to go in the path which he has trodden before us. On the contrary, to be conformed to him would be our highest ambition: "for if we suffer with him for a time, we shall reign also with him, [2 Timothy 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.12)" in glory for evermore.

***~~#2348~~***

***~~THE CHRISTIAN'S PORTION~~***

***~~[Hebrews 13:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.14)~~***

"For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come!"

Accustomed as we are to expect a future state of existence, we scarcely ever reflect on the *source*from which we have attained the knowledge of such a state. It was not from *reason*that we derived it; for the wisest philosophers of Greece and Rome could arrive at no certainty respecting it: it is "the Gospel which has brought life and immortality to light," and has thereby given us an unerring standard, by which to try every occurrence, of whatever kind.

*From a view of eternal realities, we learn neither to indulge undue delight in what is gratifying to our feelings; nor, on the other hand, to yield to dejection under the pressure of what is painful.*We learn simply to approve ourselves to God; and to look for his approbation in a future world, as a recompense for all that we can either do or suffer for him in this present life. This thought reconciled the Apostle to shame and reproach for his Redeemer's sake; for he knew that "here he had no continuing city: but he sought one to come;" and regarded the possession of that as an ample reward for all that man could inflict upon him.

The words before us will lead me to show,

***~~I. The transitoriness of earthly things—~~***

***~~We have nothing durable in this life—~~***

If anything could have been expected to continue, it would have been the city of Jerusalem: because it was, beyond all others in the universe, "the city of God," and because "its foundations were like the great mountains." But that was soon to be destroyed, so that not one stone would remain upon another that would not be thrown down. And, with the city destroyed, the whole civil and religious polity of the nation would be dissolved. Thus it had been with the great empires which had successively been established in Chaldea, Persia, and Greece: and thus, in due season, it would be with Rome also, though it was now the mistress of the world. *Even this globe itself, and all which it contains, shall before long be burned up with fire, and utterly dissolved; so that nothing under the sun can be considered as of abiding continuance.*

***~~This is a matter of daily experience to us all—~~***

We may know but little either of history or prophecy; but who does not with his own eyes behold the transitory nature of everything around him? The seasons come, and pass away; and in like manner the generations of men vanish from the earth in quick succession. It was but the other day, and those who are now in the meridian of life were children: and in a few more days they will be swept away, to make room for others who shall hereafter arise. Since the beginning of the present year, how many have been removed into the eternal world! And before the expiration of another year, how many, who are now in health, will be taken to their long home! Truly, we are like the shadow of a cloud sweeping over the plain; and soon shall vanish, to be seen no more!

This will account for,

***~~II. The portion which the Christian desires—~~***

***~~For him a continuing city is prepared—~~***

God himself has prepared it for him! Yes, God himself has built it: and its foundations are laid so deep, that nothing can ever shake them, [Hebrews 11:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.10); [Hebrews 11:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.16). To that city the Christian is already so far come, that he is entitled to all its privileges; and has, in a state of actual preparation for him, a mansion, in which he is to dwell for ever, [Hebrews 12:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.22) with [John 14:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.2-3).

In comparison with that city, all earthly edifices are unworthy of a thought. Not only are its walls and its foundations inconceivably superior to all that man can construct, but the very light that lightens it is altogether different: for, instead of needing the rays "of the sun or of the moon, the glory of God lights it, and the Lamb is the light thereof! [Revelation 21:10-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.10-23)."

***~~To this he constantly directs his steps—~~***

He is careful to inquire his way thither, and to prosecute his journey towards it every day he lives. Like the Patriarchs, he considers himself as a pilgrim and sojourner here: and, like them, whatever difficulties he meets with in the way, he presses forward, determining not to turn aside, or stop, until he has arrived within its gates! [Hebrews 11:13-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.13-16). He looks to it as the rest that remains for him; nor will he ever relax his labors, until he has attained it, [Hebrews 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.1); [Hebrews 4:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.11). In this he may be clearly distinguished from all other persons. Others are desirous of finding somewhat of a *present*portion: but "he seeks one to come," and makes it the one great business of his life to secure it.

***~~This subject may be improved,~~***

***~~1. For our conviction—~~***

*If this is practical Christianity—then how little have we lived like Christians!* We have been ever ready to take up our rest in this world; and for the most part have sought for nothing beyond it. The things of time and sense have had as much effect upon our minds as if they had been of lasting continuance; while the things of eternity have been disregarded, as though they had been altogether transient.

Were it not that we see this conduct all around us, we would scarcely conceive it possible that rational beings would act so irrational a part. Let us lay it to heart, and humble ourselves before God; and "set our affections henceforth on things above, and not on things below."

***~~2. For our consolation—~~***

We may, in the course of our pilgrimage, be oppressed with many troubles: but they are all of short continuance; whereas, the happiness which we have in prospect will abide with us forever. This consideration makes every affliction appear light and momentary, [2 Corinthians 4:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.17-18); more especially when we reflect that "tribulation is the way to the kingdom;" and that we are, like our blessed Lord himself, to be "made perfect through sufferings."

***~~3. For our direction—~~***

*Bear in mind the emptiness and vanity of earthly things, and learn to sit loose to them*, "letting your moderation be known unto all men [Philippians 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.5)." *In the use of them, be temperate; and, in the lack of them, be patient and resigned*,[1 Corinthians 7:29-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 7.29-31). And set before you "the prize of your high calling," as those did who contended in the Grecian games. Keep it ever in view; and stop not until you have fully attained it. Then shall you have the approbation of your Judge; and before long be received into the bosom of your God!

***~~#2349~~***

***~~THE SACRIFICES TO BE OFFERED BY CHRISTIANS~~***

***~~[Hebrews 13:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.15-16)~~***

"Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise--the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased."

The Jewish yoke was very heavy; and the observance of the Mosaic rites was burdensome in the extreme. From that we are happily delivered. Yet have we an *altar*upon which we are to attend, and *sacrifices*which we are bound to offer. Our altar indeed is very different from that of the Jews: as the Apostle has said in the preceding context, "We have an altar, of which they have no right to eat who serve the tabernacle, verse 10." Of their own altar they did partake; the greater part of all the sacrifices being allotted them for their support, [Numbers 18:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 18.12-13). But even under that dispensation, an intimation was given them, that, when the great offering, which their sacrifices typified, would be presented, they could have no part in it. The offerings which were presented by them for the expiation of sin, were burned outside the camp; no part of them being appropriated to the use of the priests, [Leviticus 6:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 6.30); [Leviticus 16:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 16.27).

And such is the sacrifice which was offered by our Lord Jesus Christ for the sins of the world, when he suffered outside the gates of Jerusalem; of which therefore those who continued under that dispensation could not participate. We alone, who renounce all dependence on the works of the law, and found all our hopes on the atonement which Christ has offered, can eat of this altar, and enjoy the benefits which by his meritorious death and passion he has purchased for us.

Again, though of other sacrifices the priests might eat, they might on no account eat the blood: that must be poured out even to the last drop, [Deuteronomy 12:23-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 12.23-25). But of our sacrifice, we both eat the flesh and drink the blood: and it is only by so doing that we can obtain eternal life. Indeed *on that body and blood we are to feed continually—it is the daily feast of our souls*: as our Lord has said, "My flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed, [John 6:53-55](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.53-55)." Having been offered by our Lord Jesus Christ himself on the altar of his Deity, (for he is at once the Altar, the Sacrifice, and the Priest,) it is accepted for us: and it is both our duty and our privilege to eat of it. But while we thus partake of this altar, we must ourselves offer sacrifices upon it, even "our whole selves, as living sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1)." To present these is,

***~~I. Our duty—~~***

Two kinds of sacrifices we are to offer, those:

***~~1. Of praise to God—~~***

Praise is most justly due to Him from all his creatures; but more especially from those who have been favored with a revelation of his will, and with the ordinances of his grace. The Jews, as dark as their dispensation was, were infinitely indebted to God for it, [Romans 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.2). But infinitely greater are our obligations to him for the fuller manifestations of his mercy to us in Christ Jesus, and for that better covenant of which Jesus is the Surety and the Mediator: "We therefore should offer to our God the sacrifices of praise continually." We should do it, not only at the appointed seasons of morning and evening, which in a lax sense may be called "continually, [Exodus 29:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 29.42)," but throughout the whole day: not indeed in the way of a formal service, but in the frame and habit of our minds, [1 Thessalonians 5:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.16-18). This by the prophet is called "the calves of our lips, [Hosea 14:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 14.2)," and, in our text, "the fruit of our lips;" because, as calves and first-fruits of the earth were offered in sacrifice under the law, so are praises under the Gospel dispensation. Under both dispensations, the duty of acknowledging our obligations to God, and our dependence on him, is the same: and therefore, as the Jews confessed both the one and the other by their offerings, so are we to do in ours, "giving thanks to his name."

But it is by Christ alone that our offerings can come up with acceptance before God: for, as the Jews were not at liberty to offer sacrifice any where but upon the altar in Jerusalem, [Deuteronomy 12:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 12.13-14), so neither can we present to God any sacrifice but on this altar, the Lord Jesus Christ, who alone can sanctify our gifts, and render them in any respect worthy of God's acceptance, [John 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.6). Of this it befits us to have as distinct a conception as the Jews themselves had; and never for a moment to approach our God without a deep conviction upon our minds, that *in Christ alone can either our persons or our services be ever pleasing in the sight of our God*,[1 Peter 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.5).

***~~2. Of beneficence to man—~~***

This also is a duty incumbent on us. God has so ordered in his providence, that there shall always be some who shall stand in need of assistance, and others, who, as his almoners, shall be enabled to dispense the benefits which are required, [Deuteronomy 15:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 15.11); that by a free exercise of benevolent affections there may be such a measure of equality produced, as may best subserve the interests of the whole, [2 Corinthians 8:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.14-15) with [Exodus 16:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 16.16-18). Hence, "to do good, and to share what we have," is an employment in which we would be daily occupied, each of us according to our ability. The poorest, as well as the richest, should, as far as God has enabled him, find delight in this duty, [2 Corinthians 8:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.2-4); [2 Corinthians 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.12).

Nor should we ever be so engaged in exercises of devotion, as to forget that we have duties to our fellow-creatures, which, in their place, are of equal importance with devotion itself. We may find it good to be on Mount Tabor: but we must not protract our stay there, when there is work to be done by us in the plains below, [Matthew 17:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 17.1-5). The duties of the second table must not be overlooked, any more than those of the first: nor can any measure of delight in God, ever justify us in neglecting the offices of love to man.

Liberality to the poor, especially when offered upon this altar, the Lord Jesus Christ, is as pleasing to God as any other offering whatever. Such was Paul's view of the support which he had received from the Christians at Philippi; which he represents as "a fragrance of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, and well-pleasing to God, [Philippians 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.18)." But this also must be offered only through the Lord Jesus Christ: if presented as in itself good and acceptable, it would be rejected of God with as much abhorrence as the bribe of Simon Magus was by the Apostle Peter, [Acts 8:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.18-20).

The direction given by God himself, and which must never in any case be forgotten, is this, "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks unto God and the Father by him, [Colossians 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.17)."

But that which in one view is our duty, in another view is,

***~~II. Our privilege—~~***

In this view the injunction in our text is introduced: "We have an altar, of which the Jews, while so continuing, have no right to eat:" "therefore" let us enjoy our high privileges, and offer our sacrifices continually upon this altar. And truly, to offer these sacrifices is a most inestimable privilege: for,

***~~1. We may all present them in our own person—~~***

This the Jews could not do: they must come to the priest, and put their sacrifices into his hands: and he alone could offer them upon the altar. But we who believe in Christ, are "a kingdom of priests:" among us there is "no distinction of male or female, bond or free; but we are all one in Christ Jesus, [Galatians 3:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.28);" "we are all kings and priests unto our God, [Revelation 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.6);" "the veil of the temple was rent in two;" we all "have access unto God through Christ, [Ephesians 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.18)," "even into the holiest of all, by that new and living way which he has opened for us, [Hebrews 10:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.20-22)."

Now let us only conceive what were the feelings of the Jews when they saw their high-priest on the day of annual expiation go within the veil into the presence of Jehovah, even to his mercy-seat, on which he dwelt in the Shechinah, the symbol of his more immediate presence: how highly privileged would they consider him! and how happy would they have accounted themselves, if that honor had been given to them!

But you, beloved, need not envy even the angels themselves: for through Christ you may go, every one of you for himself, "unto God as your exceeding joy," and may "lay hold of him," and commune with him, and hear his voice, and taste his love, and receive into your souls the communications of his grace and peace. It was not of himself alone, but of all the godly without exception, that John affirmed, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, [1 John 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.3)."

Learn then, brethren, to appreciate this privilege aright: and let the thought of it encourage you to draw near unto your God continually, and to present to him such sacrifices as the occasion may require.

***~~2. We may be perfectly assured of God's acceptance of them—~~***

There is an excellency in our sacrifices which there was not in those which were offered by the Jewish priests: theirs were of no value at all, but as "shadows of good things to come:" in themselves they were "carnal ordinances," deserving of no better name than "weak and beggarly elements [Galatians 4:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.9) and [Hebrews 7:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.9);" and, if not offered with a suitable frame of mind, they were altogether hateful to God, even as hateful as the cutting off of a dog's neck, or the offering of swine's blood, [Isaiah 1:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.11-14); [Isaiah 66:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.3).

But where does God ever speak in such degrading terms of our sacrifices? "Whoever offers me praise," says he, "glorifies me, [Psalm 50:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 50.23);" and, "a cup of cold water offered to a disciple for his sake, shall never lose its reward, [Matthew 10:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.42)." The two are by God himself brought into a comparison thus: "Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay your vows unto the Most High, [Psalm 50:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 50.13-14);" "to obey is better than sacrifice; and to hearken, than the fat of rams, [1 Samuel 15:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 15.22)."

Besides, the altar on which we present our offerings sanctifies everything that is put upon it. Leaven was expressly forbidden to be offered on the Jewish altar, [Leviticus 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 2.11); yet in a sacrifice of thanksgiving, or of the first-fruits, it might be offered, [Leviticus 7:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 7.11-13); [Leviticus 23:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 23.17). So shall "the fruit of our lips," and "the first-fruits of our substance" be accepted, [Proverbs 3:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.9-10), notwithstanding any imperfection with which they are offered, if only they are presented through Christ with a humble and contrite spirit: for Christ, our great High-priest, who is our altar, is also "our Advocate with the Father;" and "the incense of his prayers ascends with every sacrifice which we offer, and ensures the acceptance of it before God, [Revelation 8:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 8.3-4)."

Who with such an assurance as this, would not wish to present his sacrifices unto God daily, and without ceasing?

***~~3. We all have liberty to eat of our own sacrifices—~~***

This liberty, in reference to some sacrifices, was conceded to the offerers under the Jewish law, [Deuteronomy 12:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 12.5-7); but to us it is conceded in every offering which we can present. Do we offer the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving? "Our mouth shall be filled as with marrow and fatness, while we praise our God with joyful lips, [Psalm 63:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 63.5)." Do we offer our mite for the relief of his indigent and distressed people? Hear how he speaks of it: "If you deal your bread to the hungry, and bring the poor that are cast out to your house; if, when you see the naked, you cover him, and hide not yourself from your own flesh; then shall your light break forth as the morning, and your health shall spring forth speedily; and your righteousness shall go before you; and the glory of the Lord shall be your reward." And again, "If you draw out your soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall your light rise in obscurity, and your darkness be as the noon-day: and the Lord shall guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and make fat your bones: and you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not, [Isaiah 58:7-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.7-11)."

I appeal with confidence to all: When did you ever present any offering, whether of gratitude to God or love to man, upon this altar, and not feed richly on it yourselves? When did not fire descend from Heaven into your soul, to testify of God's acceptance of your offering? Or when did you not, after such an offering, depart, "filled and satisfied with the fatness of his house, [Psalm 36:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 36.8)." At no period did he ever dismiss you, without "satiating your weary soul, and replenishing your sorrowful soul, [Jeremiah 31:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.25)." Abound then in these sacrifices, and it shall be well with you; for you shall eat of them richly both in time and eternity, [Isaiah 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 3.10). [1 Timothy 6:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.17-19).

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. To the wretched votaries of this world—~~***

What a wretched and worthless altar have you! And what costly offerings are you daily presenting upon it! *Your time, your talents, your very souls, you are sacrificing upon that altar!*You would weep over the devotees who cast themselves under the wheels of the car of Juggernaut: why do you not weep over yourselves, when, with all your light and knowledge, you are acting a part not less infatuated than they?

Compare your state with that of the true Christian. He lives only to serve, and honor, and exalt his God: but you live only to please the world, and to gratify yourselves. He accounts nothing too great to sacrifice unto Jehovah—you will not sacrifice one lust, or interest, for him. To the world, and to self, do you devote your every hour, your every thought. And while you have eaten of your altar, which of course you have done, what have you done but "fed upon ashes, while a deceived heart has turned you aside, so that you could not deliver your soul, or say, Is there not a lie in my right hand, [Isaiah 44:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 44.20)."

And do you suppose, that, while you are partaking thus of the world's altar, you can partake of the Lord's also? Assuredly not: "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils—you cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils, [1 Corinthians 10:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.21);" "you cannot serve both God and Mammon, [Matthew 6:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.24)." I call you then to consider what will be the outcome of a worldly life: for "if you love the world, whatever you may imagine, the love of the Father is not in you, [1 John 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.15-16)." Let me entreat you then to go to your God, and to present to him that prayer of David, "Incline not my heart to any evil thing, to practice wicked works with those who work iniquity; and let me not eat of their dainties, [Psalm 141:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 141.4)." For be assured, that, *if you do not devote yourselves to God through Christ in this world, then you can never dwell with him in the world to come.*

***~~2. To the friends and worshipers of the Lord Jesus Christ—~~***

What a blessed employment is yours! A life of praise to God; and a life of love to man! What more can you wish for? What can add to your happiness, except it be an increase of grace to live more than ever unto God? Look at the angels around the throne: methinks, you have already invaded their office, and entered upon their bliss. Are they ever praising God? That is your employment day and night. Are they "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister unto those who shall be heirs of salvation, [Hebrews 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.14)." That also is your daily work, who are "doing good unto all men, and especially unto those who are of the household of faith, [Galatians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.10)." Go you on then in this blessed career: and abound daily more and more. And know that, as by the neglect of your duties "you may suffer loss in Heaven, [1 Corinthians 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.15)," so by abounding in all the fruits of righteousness, you may augment your blessedness in Heaven, and obtain through Christ "an abundant entrance" into the realms of bliss! [2 Peter 1:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.10-11).

***~~#2350~~***

***~~THE DUTY OF CHRISTIANS, AND THE RESPONSIBILITY OF MINISTERS~~***

***~~[Hebrews 13:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.17)~~***

"Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you."

MAN, as a social being, has duties to the society of which he is a member: and of these duties he must be reminded, no less than of those which are purely personal. The Church of Christ is one great family, [Ephesians 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.15), in which, as in every other family, order must be observed, by the exercise of power in those who preside, and a submission to it among those who are placed under their direction. The government that shall be exercised in it is appointed by God himself; who has invested his ministers with power to rule, and has required of their people a submission to their authority.

But as, on the one hand, there has been among some who have presided an unscriptural usurpation of authority, very different from that which God ever committed to them; so, on the other hand, there is among others a very unscriptural disregard of that authority which is legitimate, and which every minister of God is bound to exercise in that society over which he presides.

For the due administration of order and good government in the Church, the Apostle, having finished his directions respecting personal duties, proceeds to give one, which more immediately relates to our social fellowship, but which is of the greatest consequence to the welfare of that family of which we are members.

In calling your attention to this apostolic precept, I shall have occasion to set before you,

***~~I. The duty of people towards their minister—~~***

A shepherd naturally presides over his flock: and so must a pastor of God's Church exercise rule over that flock which he feeds, over which the Holy Spirit himself has constituted him an overseer, [Acts 20:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.28)." Not that civil power was ever delegated by God to his ministers; that exclusively belongs to the civil magistrates, [Romans 13:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 13.1-6). If the Lord Jesus Christ, when appealed to as an arbitrator in relation to civil rights, said, "Who made me a ruler and a arbiter over you, [Luke 12:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.13-14)," then much less can any claim of temporal authority belong to those who are called by him to the administration of affairs which are purely spiritual. Yet is there power given to ministers:

***~~1. As ambassadors from God—~~***

August as this title is, we claim it as of right belonging to us: for though we would by no means exalt ourselves, it befits us, and is our bounden duty, to "magnify our office, [Romans 11:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.13)." We come from God to you, and proclaim to you in his name the terms on which he will forgive your past rebellion, and receive you to his favor. It is in the very place of Christ that we stand, when we entreat you for his sake to be reconciled to God, [2 Corinthians 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.20).

The word which we preach to you is God's, and by you "it must be received, not as the word of man, but, as it is in truth, the Word of God, [1 Thessalonians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.13)." If our testimony be rejected, it is not man, but God himself, whom you reject, [Matthew 10:40-41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.40-41). [1 Thessalonians 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.8). See also [1 Samuel 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 8.7). Doubtless, you must judge how far the voice of the minister accords with the Word of God: for it is to that extent only that you are bound to pay any attention to it. So far are you to be from receiving the word of man implicitly and without examination, that you are required of God himself "not to believe every spirit, but to test the spirits whether they be of God, [1 John 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.1);" and to "prove all things, and hold fast that only which is good, [1 Thessalonians 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.21)." But when "the word which is delivered to you is that only which your minister has himself received from the Lord, [1 Corinthians 15:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.3)," then must you obey it as much as if it was delivered to you by God himself in an audible voice from Heaven.

Now then we hesitate not to declare, that all which we preach unto you respecting your fallen state, and the necessity of your believing in Christ as the appointed Savior of the world, and of your giving up yourselves to him "in body, soul, and spirit, to be sanctified wholly" to his service—is the very truth of God revealed in his Gospel. And while we affectionately entreat, we do also authoritatively enjoin, your acceptance of it, and your submission to it: and we affirm, that, if you reject this Gospel, you do it at your peril, and with a certainty of incurring God's everlasting displeasure! [Hebrews 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.3). 1 Peter 4:17-18.

***~~2. As stewards over his family—~~***

This also is a character belonging to us, [1 Corinthians 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.1), and a character with which a measure of authority is of necessity connected, [Luke 12:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.42). Under that character we must, at the peril of our own souls, be faithful to you, and to our God, whose servants we are, [1 Corinthians 4:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.2). Whatever we judge to be the portion most requisite for your spiritual health, that we must administer, whether it be instruction or exhortation, consolation or reproof. We must no further seek to please you, than will be for your real welfare, [Romans 15:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 15.2); if we go beyond this, we cannot be servants of Jesus Christ, [Galatians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.10).

Of course, in the exercise of discipline, there will be some things which will be more clear, and some which will be of a more dubious character. In those which are clear, and where the Word of God has precisely marked the course to be pursued, the submission of the people to the sentence of the minister should be willing and unreserved: and in those which, though not expressly defined by God, are necessary for the maintenance of order, a willing deference would be paid to the judgment of him on whom the great responsibility rests, and to whom authority has been committed by God himself for the good of the whole, 2 Corinthians 10:8; [2 Corinthians 8:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.10). [1 Timothy 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 5.17). "Not that ministers are to be lords over God's heritage, [1 Peter 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.3)," or to "have dominion over the faith" of any man, [2 Corinthians 1:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.24); but still, even in dubious matters, a degree of submission is due to them, that order may be observed, and the affairs of the Church be well administered for the good of the whole, [1 Corinthians 16:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 16.15-16). This is the kind of rule which a parent exercises in his family; and in a spirit of paternal love must it be exercised by ministers in the house of God, 1 Timothy 3:5.

These observations will acquire additional weight, if we attend to,

***~~II. The considerations with which this duty is enforced—~~***

Two considerations are here urged, as motives to a cheerful acquiescence in the duty prescribed:

***~~1. The return due to them—~~***

Ministers have taken upon themselves to seek to the uttermost the spiritual and eternal welfare of those who are committed to their care: and, when duly impressed with the importance of their office, they "watch for souls as those that must give account." When they undertake this office, they know, that if any perish through their neglect, the blood of those who perish will be required at their hands, [Ezekiel 3:17-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 3.17-21); [Ezekiel 33:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.7-9). Under this fearful responsibility, "they watch for souls," trembling lest, through their ignorance, or sloth, or cowardice, any have the truth withheld from them, or the means of salvation unprofitably dispensed to them. They feel their insufficiency, [2 Corinthians 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.16), and are ready at times to regret that ever they made themselves answerable to so solemn an extent. But a "dispensation having been committed to them, they know that a *woe*attends them," if they discharge not their office with fidelity and diligence, [1 Corinthians 10:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.16-17).

Now then I ask, Is nothing due from you to such friends and benefactors? When they, from love to your souls, and from an ardent desire to impart unto you the blessings of salvation, make "themselves your servants for Christ's sake, 2 Corinthians 4:5," renouncing all worldly cares, pleasures, and advantages, and consecrating all their time and talents exclusively to you, is there no love, no respect, no deference to be shown to them? This, I am sure, is not God's judgment respecting them: for he requires, that "you esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake, [1 Thessalonians 5:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.12-13);" and if you refuse them this tribute, you are guilty of gross injustice to them, and of vile ingratitude to God, whose commission and authority they bear.

If you suppose that their living of the altar is a sufficient recompense, I must observe, that there is scarcely a faithful servant in all the Church of God who might not turn his talents to a far better account, if financial emolument be the standard by which his recompense is to be estimated. As for the "shepherds who feed themselves, and not the flock," I speak not of them: I leave them to their own fearful responsibility, [Jeremiah 23:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.1-2). [Ezekiel 34:1-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 34.1-10). [Zechariah 11:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 11.17); but of faithful pastors, I affirm, that, if they could have the whole world for their hire, they would despise it all in comparison with one soul, whom they may present to God as begotten by their ministry and saved by their efforts, [1 Timothy 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 4.16) with [1 Thessalonians 2:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.19-20).

I say, then, you are debtors to them to a great amount: if they have been your spiritual fathers, you owe them your own souls Philemon verse 19; and if they are only your instructors, yet, as watching with all tenderness and fidelity for your souls, their griefs and their joys should be the griefs and the joys of you all, [2 Corinthians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.3).

***~~2. The benefit accruing to yourselves—~~***

Daily do they go to God, to give up, as it were, an account of the stewardship committed to them: and this they do either with joy or grief, according as they find success or disappointment in their ministerial labors. See what grief Paul experienced when his people walked disorderly, [2 Corinthians 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.4); and, on the other hand, with what ecstatic joys he was filled, when they walked worthy of their high calling, [1 Thessalonians 3:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 3.9-10).

So it is with every minister, in proportion as he approves himself faithful to his God. And how deeply are your interests involved in these exercises of your minister's soul! When he sees you disobedient to the word, and regardless of his paternal admonitions, how do his hands hang down, and his spirit sink within him! Truly, it is "with grief," and "with groanings," (as the word imports,) that he goes to his God from day to day. And the whole of his ministry, in its ardor, in its unction, in its whole character—is lowered, when he has to labor among a proud, a worldly, a contentious, a gainsaying people! His mouth is stopped; and, instead of finding an enlargement of mind, and a liberty of utterance towards them, he is constrained rather to speak only in tears of anguish, [Philippians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.18), and, as it were, in the groans of one that is travailing in birth, [Galatians 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.19).

On the other hand, in what tender strains did the Apostle address those who had received his word with power, and evinced its influence by a holy and heavenly conduct! He was among them "as gentle as a nursing mother; and was so affectionately disposed towards them, that he was willing to impart to them, not the Gospel only, but his own soul also, because they were so dear unto him, 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8." How would words, proceeding from him in such a strain, "distill as the dew," and penetrate their inmost souls! And when he felt such enlargement of heart towards them, what corresponding feelings would be generated in their souls, [2 Corinthians 6:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.11-13).

Such then are still the feelings of faithful ministers in this day. They experience either straitness, or enlargement, according as their people evince a disposition that befits the Gospel, or a state of mind tending to obstruct its influence. And therefore, if you seek nothing but your own "profit," you should, by a loving, submissive, and obedient spirit, encourage the efforts of your minister, and impart comfort to his soul.

But it is not to the present world only that this consideration must be confined. For though it is true, that a glorified soul can feel no grief, any more than God himself can—yet, for the purpose of impressing our minds, this idea may be predicated of them, as well as of him. And O! think of the joy with which they will present to God their obedient children in the last day, [Isaiah 8:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.18). [Philippians 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.16), and the grief with which they will appear as "swift witnesses" against such as were intractable and disobedient, [Malachi 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.5). Truly, their griefs will be "unprofitable indeed to you," when the very word which they have spoken to you will be found only "a savor of death" unto you, and the means of your more aggravated condemnation, [2 Corinthians 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.15-16).

***~~Allow then a word of exhortation—~~***

How long we shall stand in our present relation to each other, God alone knows: but this we know, that I must give up an account to God of my labors, as you also must of your improvement of them. O that I may be found faithful! and may you also so improve my ministry, that I may give up an account of you with joy, and not with grief! Imagine not your work done, when you have heard the word delivered to you. In reality, both your work and mine is then but just begun. We must watch for each other, and each of us for ourselves. And O! may you never have occasion for that painful reflection, "How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof, and have not obeyed the voice of my teacher, nor inclined mine ear to those who instructed me, [Proverbs 5:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 5.12-13)." And may I so watch, and so labor, that, like the Apostle himself, I may "be pure from the blood of all men, [Acts 20:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.26)."

***~~#2351~~***

***~~CHRISTIAN PRINCIPLES IMPROVED IN PRAYER~~***

***~~[Hebrews 13:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.20-21)~~***

"May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

IN reading the epistles of Paul, we cannot but observe how continually he begins and ends them with prayer. At the same time, we cannot but be struck with the extraordinary fullness and grandeur of his prayers. In truth, there is in them, for the most part, such a vast accumulation of profound matter, that it is extremely difficult to obtain anything like an adequate comprehension of them. His prayers in the epistles to the Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians, are pre-eminently distinguished in this view. But that which I have now read, if not equal to the others in grandeur, is extremely interesting, on account of the richness and variety of matter contained in it. In unfolding it to your view, I shall notice,

***~~I. His representation of the Deity, whose blessings he implores—~~***

***~~The very name which he here assigns to God is deserving of particular notice—~~***

Under the Old-Testament dispensation, Jehovah was more generally called "The Lord Almighty:" but, under the New Testament, he is commended to us rather under the endearing character of the "God of Peace." Between him and us a reconciliation has been effected, by the mediation of his dear Son: and so perfect is that reconciliation, that nothing but love is felt in his bosom towards us. In truth, every one of his attributes finds in this mystery its sublimest exercise; so that he is altogether a "God of Peace;" not having any more of adverse feeling towards us, than if mercy had been his only attribute.

But what has he done to assure our souls of "peace?"

To death and the grave had Jesus been consigned as our Surety and our Substitute. And, if he had continued in the grave, however we might believe that he had undertaken for us, we could have no assurance that his sufferings had been accepted in our behalf. But Jehovah, having "brought him again from the dead," has given us a proof, that what the Lord Jesus has done and suffered for us, has been effectual for our complete redemption: Now we see, that "that great Shepherd of the sheep," who "had laid down his life for them," is re-invested with his office, which during his imprisonment in the grave seemed to have been suspended; and "all power is given to him," to "save to the uttermost" all who are brought into his fold, and committed to his care.

Now we know, that whatever they need for protection, for sustenance, for healing—shall assuredly be imparted to them in the hour of need, [Ezekiel 34:11-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 34.11-16); [Ezekiel 34:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 34.23-24);" "the lambs shall be carried in his bosom; and he will gently lead those who are with young, [Isaiah 40:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.11);" and of those entrusted to him, he will lose not so much as one, [John 17:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.12); no power in the universe shall ever pluck them from his hands, [John 10:27-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.27-30).

***~~In all that he has done for us, he has had respect to his own covenant-engagements—~~***

Here I wish you to mark distinctly the exceeding fullness of the Apostle's mind; and the vast accumulation of important truth, which, apparently without any necessity, he brings together, for the purpose of more deeply impressing our minds, and more largely unfolding to us the great mysteries of redemption. Here he traces up everything to a covenant; a covenant made from all eternity between the Father and the Son, and in due season ratified and confirmed with the Redeemer's blood. In that covenant, the Son of God engaged to assume our nature; and in that nature, to expiate our guilt by his own obedience unto death. The Father promised to accept his vicarious sacrifice, and to give him a people who would be his joy and his glory through eternal ages. In accordance with this covenant, Christ had laid down his life: and in agreement with it, the Father had now raised him from the dead, and empowered him to perfect the work he had undertaken.

What a field of mysterious information is here opened to our view! Everything connected with our salvation is traced up to an everlasting covenant. Is God reconciled to us, and become a "God of peace?" Has he, under this character, "raised from the dead the Lord Jesus?" Has he, for the accomplishment of his gracious purposes, invested his dear Son with "the pastoral office," and committed us to him as "his sheep?" All has been effected in conformity with an everlasting covenant, and from respect to that blood by which the covenant was confirmed.

Does not all this, at the same time that it opens to us the most mysterious truths, give us an assurance which nothing else could convey? Yes, truly: for if the Lord Jesus were to allow one of his sheep to he plucked out of his hand, or the Father were to refuse to impart to us one atom of what the Savior has purchased for us, the covenant itself would be broken. But that covenant cannot be broken: and therefore every one who believes in Christ, may be assured, that God is to him a "God of peace;" and that the reconciliation which has been effected shall never finally be dissolved.

Let us now mark,

***~~II. The blessing itself which he solicited—~~***

Here also is a singular accumulation of words to convey what might have been stated in a much shorter space. But the Apostle's mind was so full, that he could not but dilate upon the subject which so strongly engaged his thoughts. His general request was, that God would make them holy, and enable them to please Him who had so mercifully accepted them to his favor. But,

***~~1. He first expresses the extent of his desire for them—~~***

"This," says he in another place, "is my wish, even your perfection, 2 Corinthians 13:9." He would have us "perfect in every good work." The whole soul has been so disorganized, in relation to all spiritual things, that it is incapable of rendering to God the obedience due to him. Hence he prays, that we may be "fitted," by a renovation and concentration of all our powers, for the execution of God's holy will. He would not have us to render any partial services, but a perfect and entire obedience. He would have us engage "in every good work," of whatever kind it be; without regarding either the difficulty of performing it, or the danger to which the performance of it may expose us.

We would know no authority but God's; no standard but God's: his will would be both the rule and the reason of everything that we do. And who that views God as reconciled towards him in the Son of his love, would wish to curtail any one duty, or to reduce the standard which is here proposed? I am sure, that a knowledge of God, as a "God of peace," cannot fail of engendering in us the desires here expressed by the holy Apostle, or of stimulating us to the attainment of a perfect conformity to the Divine will.

***~~2. He next suggests the only means by which that desire can be accomplished—~~***

It is "God who must work in us both to will and to do." *Without the operation of his Holy Spirit in us, we cannot even think a good thought.*Hence the Apostle prays, that God will "work in us that which is well-pleasing in his sight." *In addition to holy principles instilled into our minds, there must be powerful energies imparted to our souls*: for, as soon might a body, every joint of which was dislocated, perform the common offices of life, as we with our fallen powers effect the will of God in all holy obedience. *We must not hope "to please God" by anything undertaken in our own strength*. Nor indeed, however it be wrought in us, can anything come up with acceptance before God, except "through Jesus Christ." *His blood must cleanse our very best actions from the defilement that attends them*; and his intercession must obtain for them the favor of our God. Except as coming before him in this way, God could not look upon the very best action of the best of men: "He is of purer eyes than to behold" with delight any service that we can render, until it has been purified and presented by Christ himself. And I wish you to notice how carefully the Apostle strives to impress this upon our minds, where a common writer would never have thought of suggesting any such idea.

You will notice, also, how full of *gratitude*the Apostle is to that Savior who has thus reconciled us unto God, and procured for us the acceptance of our unworthy services. In truth, *the Apostle can scarcely ever mention Christ without expatiating upon his excellencies, and offering to him some ascription of praise*. Here, apparently without necessity, the Apostle adds, "To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever! Amen." And who among us has not his soul attuned to this divine and heavenly strain? Who, in the view of him as reconciling us to God, and as executing towards us the office of a Shepherd, and as procuring for us God's favorable acceptance both of our persons and our services; who, I say, does not add his "Amen" to this; and desire, from his inmost soul, that all "glory and dominion" may be given to Him by all his creatures, both in Heaven and earth!

***~~From the whole of this subject we may learn,~~***

***~~1. What we should aspire after—~~***

We can scarcely conceive anything more comprehensive of real holiness, of holiness in its utmost possible extent, than the words before us. This is what the Apostle desired in behalf of all the Christian Church: and this is what every Christian would aspire after for himself. Beloved brethren, indeed Christianity does not consist in notions of any kind. Doubtless its foundation is laid on truths revealed by Almighty God: but it must have a superstructure, a superstructure high as Heaven itself; for "our conduct must be in Heaven," where our Savior Christ is gone before. I beg you, do not attempt to lower the standard of God's requirements. Let your *labor*be for "every good work;" your *rule*, "his revealed will;" your *delight*, "whatever is pleasing in his sight:" desire nothing less than this; and aim at nothing less: but seek to be "holy as God himself is holy," and "perfect as God himself is perfect!"

***~~2. How it is to be attained—~~***

It is not by any worldly principles that such holiness can be acquired: it is by a discovery and reception of evangelical truth, even by the Gospel only: and the more fully that Gospel is understood, the more influential shall we find it on our hearts and lives. It banishes servile fear: it establishes the dominion of gratitude and love: it stimulates to high and noble exertions: it renders suffering itself a ground of joy, when sustained in the cause of our adorable Lord and Master. It even assimilates us to Christ himself.

What was there which he did not do to effect a reconciliation between God and us? And what will not his followers do to express their love to him? Behold Paul: "For the knowledge of Christ, he accounted all things but dung and dross." He was ready to die at any time, and in any manner, for the sake of Christ. In like manner will the saving knowledge of Christ operate on us also. Let this, then, be remembered by us, that *Christian principle alone will lead to Christian practice*. And in order to our advancement in the divine life, let us seek to know Christ: for then only shall we be conformed to his image, when we behold his glory, and the glory of God the Father shining forth in him!

***~~JAMES~~***

***~~#2352~~***

***~~THE DUTY OF PATIENCE~~***

***~~[James 1:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.2-4)~~***

"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing."

WE at this time are scarcely able to form a conception of the state of the Church in the apostolic age. Christianity among us is attended with none of the evils to which the primitive professors of it were exposed. But to what is this owing? Is Christianity altered at all? or is it less offensive than it was in the eyes of ungodly men? No! it is the same as ever: and, if those who profess it are not despised and hated now as they were in former times, it is because they retain "the *form*only of godliness, and have none of its power." Let persons enter into the spirit of Christianity now, as the Christians did in the Apostles' days, and they will be treated precisely as they were, so far at least as the laws of the land will admit of it: and, if they are not persecuted unto death, it will not be from there being any more love to piety in the carnal heart now, than there was then; but from the greater protection which is afforded by the laws of the land, and from a spirit of toleration which modern usages have established. *Real vital godliness was then universally hated; and it is so still.*

It was not to the Jewish converts in Palestine only that James wrote, but "to the twelve tribes who were scattered abroad." the Christian religion was persecuted not by one party only, but by every party and in every place: and it is still, in every place, "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness:" and all who will cultivate it will sooner or later need to have the consolations of our text administered to them for their support.

In the words which we have read, we see,

***~~I. The appointed portion of God's people—~~***

***~~In former ages they were hated for righteousness' sake—~~***

Go back to the time of Abel. You well know that he was murdered by his own brother Cain. And what was the ground of Cain's enmity against him? We are informed on infallible authority: "Cain slew his brother, because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous, 1 [John 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.12)." Descend through all successive ages, and you will still find the same enmity subsisting between the seed of the woman, and the seed of the serpent. As light and darkness, so Christ and Belial, both in themselves and in their members, ever have been, and ever must be, opposed to each other, 2 Corinthians 6:14-15.

As to the diversity of trials to which the godly have been exposed, we need look no further than to the short summary given us in the 11th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews: "Some 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, [Hebrews 11:35-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.35-38)."

Come to the time of Christ and his Apostles: it might be hoped that their superior light and piety, and the innumerable miracles with which their divine commission was confirmed, would screen them from such evil treatment; and especially that the Lord Jesus Christ, whose character was so spotless, and whose wisdom was infinite, would be able to overcome the prejudices of a blind infatuated world. But they were only the more exposed to the taunts and cruelty of the ungodly in proportion as their light shined with the brighter splendor. And all who in the first ages of the Church became their followers, were, in their measure, subjected to the same trials, and made to drink of the same bitter cup.

***~~The same treatment they meet with in the present day—~~***

We have observed that a mere *form*of piety will pass without opposition: but real, vital godliness, will subject us to reproach at this day, as much as ever! "Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, [2 Timothy 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.12)." That kind of godliness which arises from *self*and terminates in *self*, will bring us into favor with the world: but that which is derived altogether from Christ as its proper source and author, and is exercised altogether for the advancement of his glory, is, and ever will be, odious in the eyes of the ungodly. *Every man who exemplifies godliness in his life and conduct can no more escape persecution than Christ himself could*.

*To receive all from Christ, and to do all for Christ, is the very essence of Christian piety*: and in requiring this of his followers, our blessed Lord has bequeathed to his Church a never-failing source of variance with the world. This he himself tells us: "Do not think that I have come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law: and a man's foes shall be they of his own household."

Accordingly we find universally, that where a person begins to live by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and to devote himself to his service, all his friends and relatives will take the alarm, and try, by every method of ridicule, or menace, or persuasion, to divert him from his purpose.

Let him live in an entire neglect of his soul, and no one will trouble himself about him. He may live his whole life in such a state, and not a friend will exhort him to serve the Lord: but the least approach to piety will be discouraged by every friend and relative that he has. Not that religion will be discountenanced as religion: some evil name must be given to it first; and then it will be reprobated under that character. But the very persons who hold in the highest veneration the names of the Apostles, and of the great reformers of our Church, and who would raise shrines and monuments to departed saints, will persecute the living saints with the utmost rancor! And were the Apostles or reformers to live again upon the earth, they would receive the very same treatment from them that they met with from the people of the age in which they lived. If they called the Master of the house Beelzebub, it is in vain for any servant of his to hope that he shall escape a similar reproach, [Matthew 10:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.24-25).

As painful as this portion is to flesh and blood, none need to fear it, if only they attend to,

***~~II. The Apostle's directions in relation to it—~~***

God graciously appoints to his people this portion, in order to promote their spiritual welfare, and progressively to transform them into the Divine image in righteousness and true holiness. Hence James exhorts his afflicted brethren to regard their trials as means to an end, and:

***~~1. To welcome the means—~~***

The proper tendency of trials is to work patience in our souls. At first indeed they operate to the production of impatience, or, rather I would say, to the eliciting of those evil dispositions which lurk in our hearts. Until we have had our pride in some measure subdued, we know not how to bear the unkindness which we meet with: we fret under it, and rage even as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: but when we discover our weakness, we are ashamed of it, and humble ourselves before God on account of it, and implore grace from him to support us, and thus gradually become instructed by the discipline, and are at last "strengthened with all might by his Spirit unto all patience and long-suffering, with joyfulness, giving thanks unto the Father," who has wrought in us that very change of heart and life which has exposed us to the enmity of the ungodly world, [Colossians 1:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.11-12).

Now when we see what good our God designs us by these trials, we should not only be reconciled to them, but be thankful for them, and "count them just occasions for exalted joy." For, what price can be too great for so valuable an acquisition as that of a meek, submissive, and patient spirit? We submit with readiness to many things which are displeasing to flesh and blood for the advancement of our bodily health: and shall we not thankfully take the prescriptions of our heavenly Physician for the health of our souls? What if they are unpalatable to our taste? We would regard the affliction as good, when we know what benefits will ultimately result from it, [Isaiah 27:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 27.9); assured, that "the sufferings of this present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us! [Romans 8:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.18)."

When therefore we see the clouds gathering around us, we should not be alarmed, but should say rather, like the countryman whose fields are burned up with drought, Now God is about to refresh and fructify my barren heart, and his clouds shall drop fatness on my soul. What if your enemies meditate nothing but evil? Would that be of any concern to you, when you know who has engaged to overrule it all for good, [Romans 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.28). I say then with the prophet, "Fear not" any perils however formidable they may appear, [Isaiah 8:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.12-13); nor complain of any trials, however oppressive they may be at the time; but rejoice in them, [Luke 6:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 6.22-23), and bless God who counts you "worthy to bear" them, [Acts 5:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.41), and accept them as an invaluable "gift at his hands, [Philippians 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.29)," and "take pleasure in them, [2 Corinthians 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.10)," as knowing that they will assuredly outcome in your welfare, and "in the honor of your God, [1 Peter 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.14); [1 Peter 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.16)."

***~~2. To cultivate the end—~~***

Does God design by means of trials to make you resemble him "who was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth?" Seek to experience this benefit from them; and "let patience have its perfect work in you, that you may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing." Complain not that your trials are heavy, or of long continuance: but *be more anxious to have your dross consumed, than to have the intensity of the furnace diminished*. It was "through sufferings that the Lord Jesus Christ himself was made perfect, [Hebrews 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.10);" and if "he learned obedience by the things which he suffered, [Hebrews 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.8)," will not you be content to learn it in the same way?

We are ready to think that Christian maturity consists in active virtue: but God is not a whit less honored by passive virtue: and when patience has so far operated upon your soul as to make you "glory in tribulations" for the Lord's sake, [Romans 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.3), and you can say from your inmost soul, under all circumstances, "Not my will, but may your will be done," you will have attained that measure of holiness which constitutes Christian maturity; and you will before long, as a shock of corn that is fully ripe, be treasured up in the garner of your heavenly Father.

You have seen "Jesus, after having endured the cross, and despised the shame, sit down at the right hand of the throne of God, [Hebrews 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.2);" be content then to "suffer with him, that in due time you may be glorified together, [Romans 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.17). [2 Timothy 2:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.11-12)." Let this be the one object of your concern: and pray that "The God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. [Hebrews 13:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.20)."

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. The timid Christian—~~***

"Who are you, that you would be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man that shall be as grass—and forget the Lord your Maker?" O! "fear not the oppressor, as if he were able to destroy: for where is the fury of the oppressor, [Isaiah 51:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.12-13)." Look at Pharaoh and all his host: what could they do against the God of Israel? [Romans 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.17). Look at Herod, when he would "stretch out his hand to vex the Church:" "he falls a prey even to worms," which eat him up alive! [Acts 12:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 12.1-3); [Acts 12:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 12.23). Know that *the creature is no more than "an axe or saw in your Father's hands:" and that he can do nothing, but as your Father sees fit to employ him for your good*,[Isaiah 10:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 10.7); [Isaiah 10:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 10.11); [Isaiah 10:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 10.15). In all that he attempts, he is limited and controlled [Revelation 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.10), and shall effect nothing which shall not subserve your eternal interests, [1 Peter 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.7). Be strong then, and of good courage: and whatever cross may lie in your way, take it up cheerfully, and bear it after your Lord and Savior: for be well assured that your Savior deserves it richly at your hands.

***~~2. The suffering Christian—~~***

Shall I pity you? No; rather let me commend you as being made conformable to your Lord and Savior, [1 Peter 4:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.12-13). Repeated are James's declarations, that sufferings for Christ's sake are subjects rather for joy than for grief. "We count them happy who endure, [James 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.11)." And again, "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trials; for, when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love him, [James 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.12)." Receive then trials as "the portion which God has appointed you, [1 Thessalonians 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 3.3);" and expect that, if your *afflictions*abound for Christ's sake, "so shall your *consolations*also abound by Christ, [2 Corinthians 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.5);" and whatever you may lose for his sake, you shall even in this present life receive a hundred-fold more than you have lost, [Mark 10:28-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 10.28-30), and, in the world to come, "an accumulated weight of happiness and glory" to all eternity! [2 Corinthians 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.17). And when you shall have arrived at the realms of glory, it will be no grief to you that you "came out of great tribulation;" for then will "your Savior lead you to the living fountains of bliss, and God himself will wipe away all tears from your eyes! [Revelation 7:14-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 7.14-17)."

***~~#2353~~***

***~~THE WAY TO OBTAIN TRUE WISDOM~~***

**[James 1:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.5-7)**

"If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does."

Wisdom is necessary for the due discharge of every office of life: but it is more particularly necessary for a Christian, on account of the many difficulties to which he is subjected by his Christian profession. For *no sooner does he give himself up to the service of his God, than his friends and relatives exert themselves to draw him back again to the world*. Every species of temptation they lay in his way, if by any means they may effect their purpose, and divert him from the path which he has chosen. They ever represent to him the injury that will arise to his reputation and worldly interests, and the pain which his new course occasions to those whose happiness he is bound to consult. Frequently parental authority is interposed to arrest his progress, and to interdict the use of such means as he has found conducive to his spiritual welfare. Those *books*which would best inform his mind, that *society*which would most strengthen his heart, and those *ordinances*which would most edify his soul—are all prohibited; and no alternative is left him, but to relinquish his pursuit of heavenly things, or incur the contempt and hatred of his dearest friends.

What now must be done? He wishes to keep a conscience void of offense: but how can it be effected? *If he is faithful to his God—then he offends man. If he pleases man—then he violates his duty to God.* The principle which he adopts is in itself plain and simple; namely, that he must obey God, and not man. But how to apply this principle is a difficulty which frequently involves him in the greatest failure.

Again, in the manner of executing what his conscience dictates, he is also at a loss. He may be too bold, or too timid; too faithful, or too fawning. The different dispositions of all with whom he has to do must be consulted, and his conduct be adapted to them in all the diversified situations in which he is called to act. But "who is sufficient for these things?"

Often does he wish for an experienced counselor to advise him; and he almost sits down in despair of ever attaining such a measure of wisdom as is necessary for him.

It is to persons so circumstanced that James addresses the directions in our text. He supposes them to have "fallen into divers temptations," and to be laboring so to "possess their souls in patience," that "patience may have its perfect work, and that they may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing." But how is all this to be effected? Any mariner may steer a vessel in a calm: but how shall one so inexperienced regulate it in a storm; and so regulate it, that it shall in no respect be driven out of its course? To these anxious questions the Apostle gives an answer: wherein he directs us,

***~~I. How to seek wisdom—~~***

***~~True wisdom is the gift of God—~~***

Even earthly wisdom must in reality be traced to God as its author. The persons who formed the tabernacle and all its vessels derived all their skill from God, [Exodus 36:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 36.1-2); and even those who move in a sphere which may be supposed to be suited to the basest capacity, and spend their lives in the common pursuits of agriculture, can no farther approve themselves skillful in their work, than they are instructed by God himself, [Isaiah 28:23-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 28.23-29). But spiritual wisdom is still farther out of the reach of unassisted reason, because it is conversant about things "which no human eye has seen, or ear heard, or heart conceived, and which can only be revealed by the Spirit of God, [1 Corinthians 2:9-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.9-12)." It is emphatically "a wisdom which is from above, [James 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.17)," and which can "come only from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning, verse 17 with [Matthew 16:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.17)."

The Spirit of God, whose office it is to impart wisdom unto men, is called "the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord, [Isaiah 11:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 11.2);" and to him are we directed "to open the eyes of our understanding, [Ephesians 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.18)," and to "guide us into all truth, [John 16:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.13);" since it is only by the unction derived from him, that we can possibly attain a spiritual discernment, [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); [1 John 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.20) with [1 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.14).

***~~To him must we look for it in earnest prayer—~~***

Study, doubtless, even a study of the Holy Scriptures, is necessary; because it is only by the written word that we are to regulate our course. But to *study*we must add humble and fervent *supplication*; according to that direction of Solomon, "If you cry after knowledge, and lift up your voice for understanding; if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then shall you understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God: for the Lord gives wisdom; out of his mouth comes knowledge and understanding, [Proverbs 2:2-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 2.2-6)."

Accordingly we find the Apostle Paul crying to God in behalf of the Ephesian Church, that "God the Father would give unto them the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ, [Ephesians 1:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.16-17);" and, for the Colossians he prayed, that they also might by the same Spirit "be filled with the knowledge of God's will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, [Colossians 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.9)."

And to seek it in this way we are all encouraged, both from a general view of God's goodness, and from a particular and express promise.

"God gives to all men liberally, and upbraids not:" "he opens his hand, and fills all things living with plenteousness;" he "gives alike to the evil and the good, to the just and to the unjust." If then he gives so abundantly to those who seek him not, "will he refuse his Holy Spirit unto them that ask him?" True, they are unworthy of so rich a blessing: and, as Jephthah upbraided those who requested his assistance against the Ammonites, saying to them, "Did not you hate me, and expel me out of my father's house? and why have you come unto me, now that you are in distress?" So might God reply to them, "You have resisted my Spirit, and rebelled against the light, times without number; and how can you expect that I would aid you any more?" But he will not so treat the weeping suppliant; but will surely impart unto him the blessing he desires. Of this he assures us by an express promise: "Let him ask of God; and it shall be given to him." This promise may be relied on, as may many others which he has given us to the same effect, [John 14:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.13-14); [John 15:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.7); [John 16:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.23-24).

The *time*, and the *manner*, and the *measure*in which it shall be fulfilled—must be left to God: but fulfilled it shall be to all who rest upon it. Not that a man shall be rendered infallible, or have such wisdom imparted to him as shall keep him from every degree of error; but so much as his necessities require, God will assuredly grant to all who seek it of him in sincerity and truth.

That no man shall seek wisdom in vain, James adds a caution, from which we learn,

***~~II. How to secure the attainment of wisdom—~~***

"We must ask in faith, not wavering." Here it will be proper for me to show,

***~~1. What that faith is, which we are called to exercise—~~***

It has not respect to that individual thing which we may chance to ask; for we may possibly be asking for something which God sees would be injurious to us, or, if not injurious—yet inconsistent with the ends which he has determined to accomplish. When our blessed *Lord*prayed for the removal of the bitter cup, and *Paul*for the removal of the thorn in his flesh, neither the one prayer nor the other was granted literally; though both were answered in the way most satisfactory to the suppliants, and most conducive to God's honor.

Just so, the specific thing which we ask may be withheld, but we shall be sure of receiving something better in its stead: and it is with this latitude only that our faith must be exercised, except where there is an *express promise*for us to plead: and then we may assuredly expect that very thing to be granted to us.

Now respecting such a measure of wisdom as shall ultimately guide us through all our difficulties, we may ask with the fullest possible assurance: and in asking it, we should have no more doubt of its being given to us, than of our own existence: we should "ask in faith, nothing wavering."

If we doubt at all, our doubt must arise, either from not being fully persuaded of the *power*of God to help us, or from some suspicion of his *willingness*. But to limit his power is sinful in the extreme: and to doubt his willingness is, as John expresses it, "to make God a liar:" for the promise in the text is to every Christian who asks in faith.

I well know that persons pretend to found their doubts on their own unworthiness: but this is a mere fallacy: for every man is unworthy: and, if unworthiness is such a disqualification as deprives a man of all right to expect the blessing in answer to his prayers, then no man living has any right to expect the blessing; and the promise of God is a mere nullity.

Our need of wisdom is supposed in the very petition that is offered for it: and the more deeply we feel our need of it, the more willingly and more largely will God confer it upon us.

In praying for it therefore, we are to ask, not on the ground of any imagined worthiness in us, but on the sole ground of its having been freely promised to us: and, in that view, we must lift up our hands, "without doubting, [1 Timothy 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 2.8)."

***~~2. True faith's certain efficiency to the desired end—~~***

In some circumstances, the fulfillment of the promise seems to exceed all reasonable hope, if not the limits of possibility itself. But in proportion as it seems to exceed hope, we are to "believe in hope," just as Abraham did, when the promise was given to him of a posterity as numerous as the stars of Heaven, [Romans 4:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.18-20). Our blessed Lord has taught us this in a very striking manner. To his disciples, who expressed their surprise that the fig-tree which he had cursed, would wither away in one single night, he said, "Have faith in God. I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours, [Mark 11:22-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 11.22-24)."

The truth is, that God, if I may so say, feels his own honor implicated in fulfilling his own word: and therefore, if not for our sakes—yet for his own name's sake, "he will accomplish that which has gone out of his mouth." Yet not for his own sake only will he do it, but for our sakes also: for, "them that honor him, he will honor."

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who are unconscious of their need of wisdom—~~***

Though men are sensible enough of their ignorance in relation to human sciences, they almost universally imagine themselves competent to decide everything relating to their faith or practice. But very pointed is that declaration of Solomon, "He who trusts in his own heart is a fool! [Proverbs 28:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.26)." Respecting spiritual things, we are all by nature blind, and need, the learned as well as the unlearned, to have our understandings opened to understand them, [Revelation 3:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.17-18). [Luke 24:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.45). We all "lack wisdom" exceedingly: and to all equally would I address those words of Solomon, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart; and lean not to your own understanding: in all your ways acknowledge him; and he shall direct your paths, [Proverbs 3:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.5-6)."

***~~2. Those who are discouraged by their lack of wisdom—~~***

If you look either to the greatness of your difficulties, or your own insufficiency to meet them—then you may well faint and fail. But if you look to God, there is no ground for discouragement at all. For, can he not "ordain strength in the mouths of babes and sucklings, [Psalm 8:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 8.2)." And "does he not put his treasure into earthen vessels on purpose that the excellency of the power may be seen to be of Him, [2 Corinthians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.7)."

See how he reproved *Jeremiah*, for his desponding thoughts, [Jeremiah 1:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 1.6-7); and be content to be "weak, that his strength may be perfected in your weakness, [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9)."

See how he reproved *Peter*also, [Matthew 14:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 14.30-31); and be careful how you admit a doubt. If you are doubting, he warns you plainly, that "you must not expect to receive anything of the Lord, verse 7;" but, if you will believe, according to your faith it shall be unto you, [Matthew 9:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 9.29).

***~~#2354~~***

***~~THE DOUBLE-MINDED MAN EXPOSED~~***

***~~[James 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.8)~~***

"A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways."

*It is a generally-acknowledged truth, that the mind constitutes the man.*

In human friendships, an insincere profession of regard will not stand a severe trial; but will fail us, when we most need a firm support.

In religion too, if the heart is not right with God, we shall never persevere amidst the difficulties and dangers with which we shall be encompassed. That our faith will be tried, is certain; and that we shall need support from above, is certain. I may add too, that, if we are "strong in faith, giving glory to "God," we shall derive such aid from above, as shall carry us through all our temptations, however great they may be, and make us "more than conquerors" over all our enemies. But, if we are of a doubtful mind, we shall never finally maintain our steadfastness; but shall draw back when dangers threaten us, and faint when trials come upon us; for "the double-minded man is unstable in all his ways."

Let us endeavor,

***~~I. To ascertain the character here specified—~~***

The Apostle is speaking solely respecting confidence in God: to that therefore we shall confine our observations. Were we to enter at large into the character of a "double-minded man," we would have a vast field before us, sufficient to occupy our attention through many discourses: but by adhering simply to the view proposed to us in the text, we shall best consult the scope of James' argument, and the edification of your minds.

***~~1. The double-minded man is one whose reliance on God is not simple—~~***

There is in every man a proneness to self-dependence: and, in matters of ordinary occurrence, no man, except the truly pious, will look higher than to himself for *wisdom*to guide him, or for strength to *support*him. Even when obstacles arise which call for the intervention of a superior power, he will cry unto his God for help: but he will not "pray in faith," because he still "leans to his own understanding," and is unable to "commit his way entirely to the Lord." As there were in the days of old, those who "swore by Jehovah and by Malcham too, [Zephaniah 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zeph 1.5)," and those who "feared the Lord and yet served other gods" at the same time, [2 Kings 17:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 17.33); [2 Kings 17:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 17.41); so the double-minded man will rely on the Lord, but will rely on himself also; and make God and himself successively or conjointly the objects of his hope, as the variations of his mind, or the urgency of his necessities, may seem to require.

We must however distinguish between a prudent use of means, and a divided ground of hope: for *confidence in God is on no account to supersede the use of prudent means*. Jacob acted wisely in his endeavors to pacify his brother's wrath, sending presents by many successive messengers, and dividing his family, so that, if some were slain by Esau, others might escape. These precautions sprang not from any lack of faith in God, but from *a determination to leave nothing undone on his part which might contribute to the desired end.*His confidence was not at all in the means he used, but in God, who, he hoped, would accomplish by them the purposes of his grace, [Genesis 32:13-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 32.13-23); [Genesis 33:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 33.1-3).

But where means are so used as to become a joint ground of confidence to those who use them, there is the evil complained of in the text. Such was the character of the Jews who went down to Egypt for help against their enemies. God had told them, that "in returning and rest they would be saved; that in quietness and confidence would be their strength; and that their strength was to sit still." But not able to rely on God alone, they went down to Egypt for help, and thereby provoked God to give them up to utter destruction, [Isaiah 30:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 30.7); [Isaiah 30:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 30.15-16).

God is a jealous God, and requires that we would trust in him alone, and have no confidence whatever on an arm of flesh, [Jeremiah 17:5-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.5-8).

***~~2. The double-minded man is one whose confidence in God is not entire—~~***

Not only is there to be no reliance on the creature, but there should be no distrust of God. We should rely upon him without any doubt as to the outcome of our confidence. We should view everything, even to the falling of a sparrow, as under his control. We should feel that there is no power or counsel against him: and that for man to defeat his purposes, is utterly impossible. We should see, that, if we trust in God, he will accomplish for us everything that is good; and the things which are not, shall as certainly exist, as if they were already in existence, [Romans 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.17).

But this measure of faith is not in the double-minded man. He cannot so repose his confidence in God. He does not so realize the thought of God's universal agency, as to be able to commit everything into his hands, and to "stand still in an assured expectation of seeing the salvation of God, [Exodus 14:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 14.13-14)." On the contrary, he is ever "limiting the Holy One of Israel:" and when successive trials arise, he overlooks his former deliverances, and reiterates his usual apprehensions; like those who said, "He smote the stony rock indeed, that the waters gushed out; but can he give bread also, or provide food for his people, [Psalm 78:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.20)."

The character of the double-minded man will be more fully seen, while we proceed,

***~~II. To mark his conduct—~~***

"He is unstable in all his ways," and is ever liable to be turned from the truth—

***~~1. In his principles—~~***

Not having such clear views of the gospel of grace as to be able to lay hold of it, and confidently to expect all the blessings contained in it, he is ever open to the allurements of novelty, and ready, "like a child, to be tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and the cunning craftiness with which they lie in wait to deceive, [Ephesians 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.14)."

Matters which really are of doubtful disputation, possess in his mind an importance which does not belong to them: and he will dwell on them, to the neglect of other things which are essential to his salvation. Hence it is that heretics of every description gain such influence: and hence it is that so many, "led away by the error of the wicked, fall from their own steadfastness, [2 Peter 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.17)." The versatility both of the one and of the other originates in this, that they have never obtained such a knowledge of God in Christ Jesus as has brought saving peace into their souls.

They know not what God is to his people.

They see not to what an extent he has pledged himself to them.

They have no conception of the interest which the Lord Jesus Christ takes in them, or how indissolubly connected their happiness is with his honor and glory.

Let them be well "rooted and built up in Christ, and established in the faith, as they have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving, [Colossians 2:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.6-7);" and they will "stand fast in the faith," and suffer nothing to "move them away from the hope of the Gospel."

***~~2. In his practice—~~***

The man that cannot fully confide in God will be alarmed, whenever a storm is gathering around him. Were "his mind fully stayed on God, he would be kept in perfect peace, [Isaiah 26:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.3)," and, when threatened with the most formidable assaults, would reply, "None of these things move me, neither do I count 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)." But the double-minded man is so terrified by his adversaries, that he dares not to proceed in the plain path of duty. Like "the stony-ground hearers, he is presently offended, and in time of temptation will fall away." How many of this description are there in every place, where the Gospel is preached in sincerity and truth! It convinces many; it calls forth many to make an open profession of their acceptance of it: but *in a little time how many fair blossoms wither!*How many are blown off from the tree by storms and tempests! And how many, through their unbelief, are found rotten at the core! Truly, it is rather the gleanings, than the harvest, that is brought home to reward the toil that has been bestowed upon them; so many "turn back unto perdition, and so few believe to the saving of the soul."

But it may here be asked: Are we in no case to bend to circumstances? Did not Paul himself diversify his modes of conduct, sometimes complying with Jewish rites, which at other times he declared to have been utterly abolished? Yes, was he not of so accommodating a disposition, that he became all things to all men, and acted as a Jew or as a Gentile, according to the society with which he mixed? Yes, he did so: but there is this great difference between his conduct and that of a double-minded man: what Paul did, he did for the benefit of others: but the compliances of the double-minded man are only for the purpose of preventing harm to himself. His compliances too were only in things of perfect indifference: he would not have been guilty of denying or dishonoring the Savior on any account: but the double-minded man cares not what dishonor he brings on the Gospel, provided he may but escape the evils with which he is menaced for his adherence to it. He is "like the wave," now raised, now depressed, and driven hither and thither as the wind impels it; while the upright soul is as the rock, which, amidst all the storms and tempests that assail it, is unshaken and unmoved.

***~~Let us learn then from hence,~~***

***~~1. The vast importance of self-examination—~~***

Men do not easily see their own duplicity. "The heart is deceitful above all things," and readily persuades us, that our *doubtful confidence*in God, and our *partial obedience*to him, are all that is required of us. *But God discerns the inmost recesses of the heart, and sees there all the latent workings of worldliness and unbelief*: nor will he at the last day approve of any but those whom he can attest to have been "Israelites indeed, and without deceit." As for "the fearful and unbelieving," he will assign to them no other portion than "the lake that burns with fire and brimstone! [Revelation 21:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.8)." O let us fear, lest, after all our profession, "our religion proves vain," and we be found to have "deceived our own souls, [James 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.26)."

***~~2. The indispensable necessity of being "renewed in the spirit of our minds"—~~***

Never, until that takes place, shall we possess "the single eye, [Matthew 6:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.23-24)," and walk before God in one undeviating path of holy obedience. We may take up a profession of religion; but instability will mark our every step. To rely on God uniformly, and to "follow him fully," are far too high attainments for the natural man. Let me then entreat you to seek of God a new heart, and to pray that he would "renew a right spirit within you." Then may you hope to be "steadfast, and immoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord."

"To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne!" [Revelation 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.21)

***~~#2355~~***

***~~THE EFFECTS OF THE GOSPEL ON THE POOR AND THE RICH~~***

***~~[James 1:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.9-10)~~***

"The brother in humble circumstances ought to glory in his high position. But the one who is rich should glory in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower."

Religion certainly appears in some respects adverse to the happiness of men, inasmuch as it inculcates the daily practice of humiliation and contrition, mortification and self-denial. The injunction to cut off a right hand and pluck out a right eye, cannot, it might be thought, conduce to our comfort in this world, whatever it might do with respect to the world to come. But, if Christianity deprives us of some carnal joys (I would rather say, limit and refine them), it affords abundant ground for joy of a more exalted kind. It does not merely concede as a privilege, but prescribes as a duty, that we should "rejoice evermore." To persons of every description is this direction addressed in the words before us; and the reasons upon which it is founded are declared. In conformity with James' views, we shall show,

***~~I. The effects of religion upon the different orders of society—~~***

We shall notice them,

***~~1. Upon the POOR—~~***

These are represented as "exalted" by Christianity. Not that they are raised out of their proper sphere, or have any right to assume importance to themselves on account of their acquaintance with religion. Ignorant persons are sometimes faulty in this respect; but Paul strongly cautions all, and especially servants, upon this head, [1 Timothy 6:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.1-2); but they are exalted in their state and condition, their dispositions and habits, their hopes and prospects.

The poor are for the most part regarded in so low and base a light, that a rich man would be ashamed to acknowledge them as related to him: yes, they themselves feel a very humiliating disparity between themselves and their opulent neighbors. But, once they embrace the Gospel, and are made "rich in faith," "God himself is not ashamed to be called their God:" he calls them "his friends," "his sons," "his special treasure:" "he gives them a name better than of sons and of daughters." They instantly become "kings and priests unto God;" and the very angels in Heaven account it an honor to wait upon them, as their ministering servants.

In short, being born from above, they are sons of God, and "if sons, then heirs—heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ!" What an elevation is this! Surely, in comparison with it, all earthly honors are no better than the baubles of children, or the delusions of maniacs.

When elevated thus, the poor begin to feel also dispositions suited to their state. While they are destitute of religion, they either riot in a licentious independence, without any regard to character, or, with a servility unrestrained by conscience, yield themselves willing instruments to anyone that can reward their services. But when once they are taught of God, they learn primarily and solely to regard his will. We again say, that they will obey all the lawful commands of their superiors, [Romans 13:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 13.1-2); [Romans 13:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 13.4). They will regard their authority as God's, and do whatever is required of them, "as unto the Lord:" but their first inquiry will be, "What does my God require?" and, if urged to violate their duty to him, they will reply as the Apostles did, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you rather than unto God, you judge." "We ought to obey God rather than men, [Acts 5:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.29)."

Nor have they a lower standard of action than the most polished Christian upon earth: if they are truly upright before God, the rule by which they walk is that prescribed by the Apostle in [1 Corinthians 7:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 7.21-23); and what can the highest refinement suggest more? Here therefore their elevation again appears, inasmuch as their habits are no longer formed by self-interest or the caprice of men, but founded on, and assimilated to, the mind and will of God.

As to the hopes of the poor, they have little to stimulate their ambition. To provide for their present needs, and to lay up something for a time of sickness, is the utmost that the generality of them aspire to.

But what glorious views does religion open to them! Truly, instead of looking up with admiration to the great and opulent, they rather stand on an eminence, from whence they look down upon them with pity and compassion. What are the prospects of princes, to those which are unfolded to their view? They can look within the veil of Heaven itself, and there see crowns and kingdoms reserved for them, yes, a seat upon the throne even of God himself. Who that contemplates this will not say that religion "exalts" the poor?

***~~2. Upon the RICH—~~***

The gospel humbles the rich. It does not indeed despoil them of that honor which is due to their rank; (it rather confirms it to them, [Romans 13:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 13.7);) but it humbles them in their own estimation, and in the estimation of others, and in the daily habit of their minds.

The rich are apt to arrogate much to themselves on account of their distinctions; and even before God to entertain high thoughts of themselves: "Our lips are our own: who is lord over us?" But let saving grace reach their hearts, and they no longer say, "I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing;" but, "I am wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." And so far are they from despising the poor on account of the inferiority of their station, that they most gladly "condescend to men of low estate," and love them truly as brethren, notwithstanding they are "brethren only of humble circumstances."

It is scarcely needful to say how much they are lowered also in the eyes of others. Only let them become true disciples of Christ, and it will soon appear that they have lost the esteem of the ungodly world. *However wise or amiable they may be, the serpent's seed will hiss at the godly!* Though David was a king, and as eminent for piety as man could be, he was the sport of fools, and "drunkards made songs upon him." If any qualities could have insured universal respect, the Lord Jesus Christ would have obtained it. But "he was despised and rejected by men:" and "if they called the Master of the house Beelzebub, much more will they those of his household."

But though the contempt of men was once the most formidable of all evils, they are not much concerned with it now; for they are made "poor in spirit," and consequently are regardless of the indignities that are offered to them. They know what they deserve at God's hands; and therefore they are willing to bear anything from those whom He may use as instruments of his indignation or love. They are willing also that God would deal with them in any way he may see fit; and whether he give or take away, they are ready to bless his holy name. They are brought to a state of mind resembling that of a man subsisting upon alms: "they come to their God and Savior for gold, that they may be enriched; for eye-salve, that they may see; and for clothing, that the shame of their nakedness may not appear."

They are contented, yes they are glad, to seek their daily bread at his hands, and to live altogether as *pensioners on his grace and mercy*. In short, as in their own estimation they are vile and guilty, so in the habit of their minds they are meek, patient, submissive, and dependent.

Thus, while the poor are elevated by religion, the rich "are reduced and made low."

And what shall we say of these diversified effects? Are they represented as adverse to our happiness? No! we are rather led to contemplate,

***~~II. The universal satisfaction which they are calculated to produce—~~***

That the poor have cause to rejoice in their exaltation, is obvious enough.

***~~Think what the poorest of the Lord's people are privileged to enjoy—~~***

First, they have the most exalted of all characters. Though some few of the Lord's people have been opulent, the generality have been "a poor and afflicted people." The Apostles had little else besides a scrip (bag) and a staff; they were "poor, though making many rich; and had nothing, though in some respects they possessed all things."

When it pleased God also to send his only dear Son into the world, what was the state to which he appointed him? It was that of a poor man, who "had nowhere to lay his head." And has not this dignified the condition of the poor? Yes, have they not reason to glory, in being so assimilated to their Lord and Savior? The tribe of Levi had no portion allotted to them in Israel: but were they therefore less honorable than the rest? No! the Lord was their portion: and their lack of earthly possessions was a favor conferred, and not a privilege denied. Thus it is an honor to the poor that they have their ALL in God: and though flesh and blood cannot receive the saying, it is really a greater honor to be fed like Elijah from day to day by the special providence of God, than to be living upon stores collected by the hands of men.

Secondly, they are in the most favorable of all states. Our adorable Savior has determined this point beyond a doubt. He has declared, that "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of Heaven." "With men," he says, "it is altogether impossible." The Rich Youth perished only because he would not sacrifice his earthly possessions: had he been a poor man, he would in all probability have followed Christ, and have been at this moment in Heaven. Besides, a rich man is afraid of being thought singular, if he "follows the Lord fully:" he imagines that his situation obliges him to conform to the customs of the world: he is ashamed to associate with the Lord's people: nor will he suffer anyone to deal faithfully with him.

But a poor man may follow his own ways, and seek instruction wherever he can obtain it; and nobody will trouble himself about him. His instructor also may, without compliment or circumlocution, come at once to the point, and "declare unto him the whole counsel of God." What an advantage is this for the obtaining of everlasting happiness; and what a solid ground of joy to all who possess it.

Thirdly, they have a sovereign antidote against all their disadvantages! Be it granted that they lack the benefit of human learning: but they have the teachings of God's Spirit. They lack many earthly comforts; but they have the promises of the living God. "Their afflictions may abound; but their consolations also abound by Christ."

Wherein they may be supposed to labor under any disadvantage, they have everything that they need, treasured up for them in Christ Jesus; and out of his fullness they receive, in the time and measure which he knows to be best for them. Poor they may be in this world's goods; but they are enriched with "the unsearchable riches of Christ."

Now let the poor say whether they have not reason to rejoice. Surely if they estimate their state aright, they may well "rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. See [Habakkuk 3:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 3.17-18)."

***~~That the rich have equal reason to rejoice in their humiliation, is, though less obvious, not at all less true—~~***

What a mercy is it to them, that they are brought to see the vanity of all their earthly distinctions. In their unenlightened state, the rich have no conception how contemptible those things are, which they suppose to be of such mighty consequence. *What is a high-sounding title, or a large estate—to a man that in a few hours is about to launch into eternity?*Yet that is the real condition of all: we are like flowers, which by the influence of the sun and rain are brought forth rapidly into mirthful luxuriance, but by an eastern blast is withered in an hour! Everything we possess is perishing; and we ourselves also are fading away in the midst of our enjoyments!

Ungodly men do not like to reflect on these things; but the true Christian delights to realize them in his soul: and he well deserves our warmest congratulations, who has learned to estimate earthly things by the standard of truth.

It is also a mercy to the rich servants of God, that they are made to know wherein true honor and happiness consist. That which may be possessed by the vilest, as well as by the best of men, can never constitute the chief good of man. But,  
to be restored to the favor of God,  
to live in the enjoyment of his presence,  
to possess his image on our souls,  
to glorify him in the world,  
to be growing up into a fitness for his everlasting inheritance  
—this is honor, this is happiness. And O! what a mercy it is to see and feel this! Blessed are you, whoever you are, who have lost your relish for earthly vanities, and are brought to set your affections upon things above!

Finally, it is a mercy past all conception to have for their portion an eternal inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—reserved in Heaven for them! Were they instantly, and of necessity, to be deprived of all they possess, we would still bid them to "rejoice that they were made low:" for earthly riches, however great, are only dung and dross in comparison with the Christian's portion. Let those who in this life "took joyfully the confiscation of their goods," say, whether they found any reason to alter their minds, when once they reached the mansions of bliss? How small do their sacrifices now appear, how unworthy of a single thought! Blessed then indeed are you who are enabled to "forsake all and follow Christ!" Even "in this world" he promises you "an hundred-fold;" but what you shall possess in the world to come "no eye has seen, or ear heard, or heart conceived!"

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

But what shall we say, either to the poor or rich, who are destitute of a saving interest in Christ? Shall we bid them to rejoice? What cause of joy have the *poor*, who, after all their trials and privations here, shall have no part or lot with the saints above? Or what ground of glorying have the *rich*, who will so soon be "lifting up their eyes in torments, seeking in vain a drop of water to cool their tongues?" Would we attempt to console any from a consideration of their present attainments or possessions, the prophet would rebuke our folly, and dash the cup out of their hands! [Jeremiah 9:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 9.23-24).

Be it known then to you all, that the poor must be exalted here, if ever they would be exalted in the eternal world; and the rich must be humbled here, if ever they would attain the true riches. The poor must be made partakers of a divine nature, before they can "inherit a throne of glory;" and the rich must be emptied of self, before they can be "filled with all the fullness of God."

***~~#2356~~***

***~~THE TESTIMONY OF GOD RESPECTING HIS TRIED PEOPLE~~***

***~~[James 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.12)~~***

"Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him."

Under the *afflictions*with which we are visited in this valley of tears, *philosophy*has suggested many grounds for resignation and submission: but to find in them matter for thankfulness and joy, was beyond the reach of unassisted *reason*. To that however are we led by the voice of Scripture revelation, which teaches us to look with confidence to a future state, wherein all that we endure for God, and in meek submission to his will, shall be compensated with a weight of glory, proportioned to the trials we have here sustained for his sake, and the spiritual improvement which we have derived from them.

James, who wrote to "his Jewish brethren who were scattered abroad" through the violence of persecution, frequently repeats this consolatory idea. He begins with bidding them to "count it all joy when they face trials of many kinds." Towards the close of his epistle he declares this to be at least the persuasion of his own mind, "Behold, we count them happy that endure, [James 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.11)." But in the text he does not hesitate to affirm it as an unquestionable truth, that such persons are truly blessed: "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him." Now as he spoke this by inspiration from God, I shall consider it as a declaration from God himself; and shall unfold to you,

***~~I. God's testimony respecting his tried people—~~***

"Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial."

***~~This sentiment doubtless, at first sight, appears very paradoxical—~~***

How can it be? Consider the state of God's tempted people. Consider only the lighter trials which they are called to bear for their Lord's sake: hatred, reproach, contempt, ridicule, the opposition of their nearest friends and relatives; this, every one that will follow the Lord Jesus Christ, must endure: a variety of circumstances may tend to screen a man from heavier trials; but these, in some measure at least, are the lot of all, even of the least and poorest of Christ's followers, as well as of the most conspicuous among them. Let the light but shine even into the poorest cottage, and the surrounding darkness will evince its incapacity to maintain communion with it.

But come to the severer trials which thousands have to sustain: think of privations, the most distressing that can be imagined to flesh and blood: think of bonds, and imprisonment: think of death in its most terrible and appalling forms: shall it be said that there is any blessedness in these? Must we not rather say, that the persons who are called to endure such things are in the most wretched state? Yes, I must confess, as Paul himself says, "If in this life only such persons have hope, they are of all men most miserable," and altogether in a most pitiable condition.

Nevertheless, while we heartily subscribe to this position of the Apostle, we must still say of the declaration in our text that,

***~~Yet it is most true—~~***

*These sufferings must be viewed in their reference to eternity; and then they will wear a very different aspect from what they do when considered merely in themselves.* For, "to those who love him and suffer for him, God has promised a crown of life, which they shall receive" at his hands the very instant that their sufferings are finished. Consider, "a crown!" the highest of all distinctions! "A crown of life!" not a corruptible one, like those which were given to the victors in the Olympic games; nor a temporary one, which is soon to be transferred to a successor; an unfading crown of life and glory!

Conceive of the saint as just entering into the eternal world, and ascending to Heaven from the flames of martyrdom: what a cloud of witnesses come forth to congratulate him on his victory, and to welcome him to those blessed abodes! Behold him welcomed too by his Lord and Master, for whose name he has suffered, and under whose banners he has fought. Hear the plaudit with which he is received, "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of your Lord!"

See the crown brought forth, and put upon his head; and behold him seated on the very throne of God himself, according to that promise, "To him who overcomes, will I give to sit down with me upon my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father upon his throne!"

I say, behold these things, and then tell me, whether the prospect of such glory, assured to him by the promise and oath of God, did not constitute him blessed in the midst of all his sufferings?

Of the myriads, respecting whom it is said, "These all came out of *great tribulation*," do you suppose there is one who regrets the sufferings he once endured for the sake of Christ? Not one assuredly! There is not one who is not thankful that he was ever counted worthy to suffer for the Redeemer's sake.

But is James peculiar in his opinions on this head? No; our blessed Lord bids all "who suffer for righteousness' sake, to rejoice and leap for joy, [Matthew 5:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.10-12);" and to the same effect speak all his holy Apostles, [Romans 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.3). [1 Peter 4:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.12-14).

Though therefore "no suffering is for the present joyous, but grievous," yet, taken in connection with their present consolations, and with all the future consequences, sufferings may justly be regarded as grounds of thankfulness and joy, [Philippians 2:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.17-18).

Such then being God's testimony, I proceed to set before you,

***~~II. Some instructions arising out of it—~~***

There are in our text several instructive hints, which ought not to be overlooked:

***~~1. We should so love the Lord Jesus Christ, as to be willing to suffer for him—~~***

Love, even among men, is of little value, if it will make no sacrifices for the object beloved. But the Lord Jesus Christ is worthy of all the love that can ever be exercised towards him. Consider only what love he has manifested towards us: how he left the bosom of his Father for us, and emptied himself of all his glory, in order to assume our nature, and to expiate by his own blood the sins of the world. Is it a mere cold esteem that is a proper return for such love? When the terms on which alone he could save the world were proposed to him, he said, "Lo! I come, I delight to do your will, O God!" When he then proposes that we, in testimony of our love to him, would "take up our cross and follow him," shall we draw back, and complain that his yoke is too heavy for us? Of what value will he account such love as that? Go, he will say, and "offer it to your earthly friend," and see whether he will value it, [Malachi 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 1.8); how much less then is it suited to express your obligations to me, who have redeemed you to God with my own blood!

It is worthy of observation, that the same person who in the first clause of the text is spoken of as "persevering under trial," in the last clause is characterized as "loving God:" for, in fact, none will suffer for him, who do not love him; nor can any love him, without being willing to suffer for him. If therefore we profess love to God and to the Lord Jesus Christ while yet we are afraid of bearing the contempt and hatred of an ungodly world for his sake, we only deceive our own souls: for he has plainly told us, that he will consider none as his disciples, who will not take up their cross daily and follow him. He has told us, that, if we are ashamed of him and deny him, then he will be ashamed of us and deny us: and that those only who are willing to lay down their lives for his sake, shall ever save them unto life eternal.

I beg you, brethren, try your love to the Savior by this touchstone: and never imagine that it is sincere, unless it will stand this test.

***~~2. We should so apprehend God's promises, as utterly to despise men's threats—~~***

"Exceeding great and precious are the promises which God has given unto those who love him:" nor is it possible for us to be in any situation, wherein he has not made ample provision for our support and consolation. Now these *promises*are all sure and certain: "they are all yes and amen in Christ Jesus:" nor can so much as one jot or tittle of them ever fail.

But look at the threatenings of man; how empty and vain are they! The whole universe combined cannot effect the smallest thing without God's special permission: and, if permitted to execute their purposes, how impotent is their rage, when God is pleased to interpose in behalf of his people! Fire could not hurt the three Hebrew youths, nor lions injure the defenseless Daniel, nor chains and dungeons confine Peter on the eve of his intended execution.

Men, the most potent monarchs not excepted, are no more than an axe or saw in the hand of God, who uses it, or not, according to his own sovereign will, and for the promotion only of his own glory. "Who then are you, that you would be afraid of a man that shall die, and of a son of man that shall be as grass; and forget the Lord your Maker?"

Besides, suppose man to prevail to the extent of his wishes; what can he do? He can only reach the body: the soul he cannot touch. "Fear not man therefore, who can only kill the body, and after that 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!" And, as God has promised that "our strength shall be proportioned to our day" of trial, let us rest on his word, and hold in utter contempt all the menaces of our most potent enemies. See [Isaiah 37:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 37.22).

***~~3. We should so realize eternity as to rise superior to all the concerns of time and sense—~~***

In the view of eternity, all that relates to time vanishes, as the twinkling star before the mid-day sun. *If we could suppose a man caught up to Heaven for a time, and then sent down again to abide a few more years upon earth—what would be his estimate of those things which so occupy and enslave our carnal minds? The baubles of children would not be more contemptible in his eyes, than the glittering pageantry of kings!* And, though the sufferings which are sometimes inflicted on the saints are heavy, they would be reckoned by him as "not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall before long be revealed in us." But it is not needful that we be transported to Heaven to this end; we have the whole set before us in the oracles of God: and, if we believe those oracles, we may be as fully convinced of the comparative insignificance of earthly things, as if we saw the crown of glory with our bodily eyes, or already tasted of the heavenly bliss!

Let us then seek that "faith, which is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen." Then shall we, like those of old, "take joyfully the confiscation of our goods, knowing that we have in Heaven a better and an enduring substance;" and, with Moses, shall "esteem even the reproach of Christ as greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt!"

***~~#2357~~***

***~~SIN, THE OFFSPRING OF OUR OWN HEARTS~~***

***~~[James 1:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.13-15)~~***

"When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."

There are trials necessarily connected with the Christian life, and which often, through the weakness of our nature, become the occasions of sin. There are other temptations which are the direct and immediate cause of sin. The trials are external; the temptations are within a man's own bosom. The trials may be referred to God as their author, and be considered as a ground of joy: the temptations must be traced to our own wicked hearts; and are proper grounds of the deepest humiliation. This distinction is made in the passage before us. Trials are spoken of in verses 2 and 12. In verses 13 to 15, temptations are addressed.

In the words of our text, we notice the *origin*, the *growth*, and the *outcome*of sin. We notice:

***~~I. Sin's origin—~~***

***~~Many are ready to trace their sin to God himself—~~***

This is done when we say, "I could not help it:" for then we blame our Maker, as not enduing us with strength sufficient for our necessities. It is done also, though not quite so directly, when we ascribe our fall to those who were in some respect accessary to it: for then we blame the providence of God, as before we did his creative power. It was thus that Adam acted, when he imputed his transgression to the influence of his wife, and ultimately to God who gave her to him, [Genesis 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.12).

***~~But God neither is, nor can be, the author of sin—~~***

He may, and does, try men, in order to exercise their graces, and to show what he has done for their souls. Thus he tried Abraham, and Job, and Joseph, and many others. But these very instances prove that he did not necessitate, or in any respect influence, them to sin; for they shone the brighter in proportion as they were tried. But he never did, nor ever will, lead any man into sin. And though he is said to have "hardened Pharaoh's heart," and to have "moved David to number the people," he did neither of these things in any other way than by leaving them to themselves, [Exodus 4:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 4.21) and [2 Samuel 24:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 24.1) with [2 Chronicles 32:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 32.31).

***~~All sin must be traced to the evil propensities of our own nature—~~***

"A clean thing cannot be brought out of an unclean;" and therefore no descendant of Adam can be free from sin. We have within us a secret bias to sin; which, however good our direction appears to be, operates at last to turn us from God. That bias is called "lust" or desire: and it works in all, though in a great variety of degrees and manner. All sin is fruit proceeding from this root, even from "the lust that wars in our members;" and in whatever channel our iniquity may run, it must be traced to that as its genuine and proper source.

This will appear more strongly, while we mark,

***~~II. Sin's growth—~~***

***~~Sin's first formation in the soul is often slow and gradual—~~***

"Lust," or our inward propensity to sin, presents something to our imagination as likely to gratify us in a high degree. Whether it be profit, or pleasure, or honor—we ponder it with a longing eye, and thereby our desire after it is inflamed. Conscience perhaps suggests that it is forbidden fruit which we are coveting; and that, as being prohibited, it will ultimately tend rather to produce misery than happiness.

In opposition to this, our sinful principle intimates a doubt whether the gratification is forbidden; or at least whether, in our circumstances, the *tasting*of it is somewhat allowable. At all events, it suggests:  
that our fellow-creatures will discover nothing about it;  
that we may easily repent of the evil;  
that God is very ready to forgive;  
and that many who have used far greater liberties are yet happy in Heaven;  
that, consequently, we may enjoy the object of our desire, without suffering any real loss.

In this manner the sinful *affections*are kindled,  
and the *will*is bribed to give its consent, [Isaiah 44:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 44.20);  
then the *bait*is swallowed,  
the hook is fastened within us,  
and we are "dragged away" from God, from duty, from happiness.

Yes, if God does not seasonably interpose, then we are drawn into everlasting perdition.

(See this whole process illustrated in [Genesis 3:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.1-6).)

***~~Sin's progress to maturity is generally rapid—~~***

The metaphor of a fetus formed in the womb, and brought afterwards to the birth, is frequently used in Scripture in reference to sin, [Job 15:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 15.35). [Psalm 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 7.14) with the text. When the *will*has consented to comply with the suggestions of the evil principle, then the embryo of sin is, if we may so speak, formed within us; and nothing remains but for time and opportunity to bring it forth!

This of course must vary with the circumstances under which we are. Our wishes may be accomplished, or may prove abortive: but whether our sinful desire is fulfilled or not, sin is imputed to us, because it formally exists within us: or rather it is brought to the birth, though not altogether in the way we hoped and expected.

We proceed to notice,

***~~III. Sin's outcome—~~***

Sin was never barren! Its outcome is numerous as the sands upon the sea-shore: but in every instance*, the name of sin's first-born has been death!*

***~~1. Death is sin's penalty—~~***

Death has three aspects:  
temporal death,  
spiritual death,  
eternal death.

All three aspects were threatened as the punishment of transgression while our first parents were yet in paradise. And on many occasions has the threatening been renewed, [Ezekiel 18:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 18.4). [Romans 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.18); [Romans 6:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.21); [Romans 6:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.23). [Galatians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.10).

So *sin and death are absolutely inseparable!*

***~~2. Death is sin's desert—~~***

The fixing of death as the consequence of transgression was no arbitrary appointment. The *penal*evil of death, is no more than the *moral*evil of sin.

Consider the extreme malignity of sin:  
What rebellion against God!  
What a dethroning of God from our hearts!  
What a preferring of Satan himself, and his service—to God's light and easy yoke!

View sin as it is seen in the agonies and death of God's only Son! Can that sin be of small malignity, which so oppressed and overwhelmed "Jehovah's fellow?" Of those who are now suffering the torments of the damned, not one would dare to arraign the justice of God, or to say that his punishment exceeded his offense! Whatever we in our present state may think, our mouths will all be shut, when we have juster views of sin, and an experimental sense of the bitterness of sin, [Matthew 22:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 22.12).

***~~3. Death is sin's tendency—~~***

We may see the proper effect of sin in the conduct of Adam, when he fled from God, whom he had been accustomed to meet with familiarity and joy, [Genesis 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.8). He felt a consciousness that his soul was bereft of innocence; and he was unable to endure the sight of Him whom he had so greatly offended.

In the same manner sin affects our minds:  
sin indisposes us for communion with God;  
sin unfits us for holy exercises;  
and, if a person under the guilt and dominion of sin were admitted into Heaven, he would be unable to participate in the blessedness of those around him; and would rather hide himself under rocks and mountains, than dwell in the immediate presence of a holy God!*Annihilation would be to him the greatest favor that could be bestowed upon him!*So truly does the Apostle say, that "the motions of sin do work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death! [Romans 7:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.5)."

***~~Advice—~~***

***~~1. Do not palliate sin—~~***

Though circumstances doubtless may either lessen or increase the guilt of sin, nothing under Heaven can render it light or trivial. Our temptations may be great; but nothing can hurt us, if we do not allow ourselves to concur with the tempter. That wicked fiend exercised all his malice against our adorable Lord; but could not prevail, because there was nothing in him to second or assist his efforts. So neither could he overcome us, if we did not voluntarily submit to his influence.

*All sin therefore must be traced to the evil dispositions of our own hearts*; and consequently affords us a just occasion to humble ourselves before God in dust and ashes. If we presume to reflect on God as the author of our sin, we increase our guilt a hundred-fold! It is only in abasing ourselves that we can at all hope for mercy and forgiveness.

***~~2. Do not trifle with temptation—~~***

We carry about with us much inflammable matter, if we may so speak; and temptation strikes the spark which produces an explosion! How readily are evil thoughts suggested by what we see or hear; and how strongly do they fix upon the mind! "Behold how great a matter a little fire kindles!" Let us then stand at a distance from the places, the books, the company, that may engender sin. And let us, in conformity with our Lord's advice, "watch and pray, that we enter not into temptation."

***~~3. Do not for one moment neglect the Savior—~~***

There is none but Jesus that can stand between sin and death. Indeed, we can escape eternal death only by believing in him. We deserve death—we have deserved it for every sin we have ever committed! Ten thousand deaths are our proper portion. Let us then look to Him who died for us. Let us look to him, not only for the sins committed long ago, but for those of daily incursion. *Our best act would condemn us, if Jesus did not "bear the iniquity of our holy things."* He is our only deliverer from the wrath to come! To Him therefore let us flee continually, and "cleave unto him with full purpose of heart."

***~~#2358~~***

***~~GOD THE ONLY SOURCE OF ALL GOOD~~***

***~~[James 1:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.16-17)~~***

"Do not be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows."

There is much evil in the world. But people are little aware from whence it proceeds. We forget that at the first creation there was no such thing as evil, either natural or moral, in the whole universe. God, it is true, could have prevented the existence of it: just so, he could have prevented the existence of the world itself, which only came into being through the operation of his sovereign will and of his almighty power.

It is not for us to inquire, why he permitted evil to exist. Doubtless he will ultimately be glorified in all that he has done, yes and, on the whole, in all that he has permitted; though we cannot exactly say how that glory shall accrue to him. All that we, in our present state, are called to, is, to feel and to maintain that he does all things well: that, however he may permit, he does not do evil; but that, on the contrary, all good, and nothing but good, is to be ascribed to him.

Now it is of great importance that we should, at least as far as regards ourselves, have just views of this matter, since for lack of them we greatly err. So the Apostle evidently intimates in the words which we have read; from whence I will take occasion to show:

***~~I. The true character of the Deity—~~***

God is here declared to be the only, and the unchanging source of all good.

***~~1. God is the only source of all good—~~***

The sun in the material world may properly be called "the father of lights," because there is no light but what proceeds from him. The moon and stars only reflect the light which they receive from him.

Just so is God to the whole creation—he is the only source of light and life. There is no "good and perfect gift," but proceeds from him.

In creation, all the worlds were framed by him, and everything in them was fitted for its peculiar use, and for the benefit of the whole. Everything in God's creation was "very good."

In providence, everything is ordered with unerring wisdom to subserve the designs of God, and to accomplish his holy will; yes, and ultimately to further the welfare of all his chosen people.

In grace, this appears in a still more striking point of view. Every good disposition in the heart of man is formed by God. Without the agency of his Spirit, each person would continue one entire and unaltered mass of corruption through all eternity! If we either will or do anything that is good, it is in consequence of his electing love and sovereign grace [Philippians 2:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.12-13).

***~~2. God is the unchanging source of all good—~~***

If in the communication of good he in some respects resembles the sun, he in other respects differs widely from it. The sun, though the fittest emblem that we have of immutability in dispensing good, has yet its changes, both annual and diurnal, and at different seasons of the day and year, casts its shadows in a widely different form, according to the quarter in which it shines, and to its position in our hemisphere, as more vertical or horizontal.

But not so with Jehovah, the Father of all heavenly lights. There are no changes with him, [Malachi 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.6). "With him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." To his believing people he is "the same yesterday, today, and forever, [Hebrews 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.5); [Hebrews 13:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.8)." True, his light may be intercepted by a cloud: but he himself remains the same: and let only the cloud be dispelled, and he will shine as bright as ever on the believing soul.

Now that you may see how important this view of the Deity is, I beg you to notice,

***~~II. The errors we run into for lack of duly adverting to it—~~***

***~~1. We will err exceedingly in a way of self-vindication—~~***

This is the precise point to which James directs our attention.

After saying, "When tempted, no one should say: 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone;" he adds, "Do not be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows."

Evil is from yourselves, and from yourselves alone.

Good, and only good, is from God.

Now you cannot but know, that, like our first parents, we are ever ready to excuse ourselves, and to cast the blame of our sins, either:  
on the tempters that led us to them, or  
on the propensities which God himself has implanted in us.

But in both of these cases we do, in fact, cast the blame on God, as either immediately or remotely, the cause of the evils we commit. But beware of all excuses, be they what they may. The fault is all your own, and nothing but humiliation and contrition will befit you to the last hour of your lives. *If ever you perish, you will have none but yourselves to blame!*

***~~2. We will err exceedingly in a way of self-dependence—~~***

We are ever prone to look for some good in ourselves, instead of seeking all good from God alone. But it is in vain to rely on any: *wisdom*of our own to guide us,  
or strength of our own to support us,  
or *righteousness*of our own to justify us.

It is on this account that God has been "pleased to treasure up in his dear Son a fullness of them, that we may receive them all from him" from day to day, and from hour to hour.

Know this, that in yourselves "you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked;" and "from Christ alone can you ever receive clothing to cover you, or gold to enrich you, or the eye-salve" that shall administer healing to your organs of vision. "All your fresh springs must be in God!" In God alone.

***~~3. We will err exceedingly in a way of self-applause—~~***

We are prone to take to ourselves credit from what is good, and to shift blame off from ourselves in what is evil. But "if we differ from others or from our former selves—then who is it that has made us to differ? or what have we that we have not received from God himself?" As well might the earth boast of its fertility independently of the sun, whose genial rays have called it forth, as we arrogate to ourselves honor on account of any good that we have ever done.

If you would see what the earth would be independent of the sun—then go to the polar regions in the depth of winter.

And if you would see what you yourselves would be independent of God—then go down to that place where God never comes by the operations of his grace, and where the damned spirits are left to themselves.

If there is any good in you—then it is from Christ that you have received it; for without him you could do nothing. If you have attained to any good thing, you must say, "it is by the grace of God." Even if you equaled the Apostle Paul in holiness, you must say, "By the grace of God I am what I am!" In reference to every holy thought or act, you must say, "It was not I, but the grace of God that was with me! [1 Corinthians 15:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.10)."

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

"Do not err then, my beloved brethren!"

Be aware of your sinful tendencies; and remember how to correct them. *You never can err in taking shame to yourselves: nor can you ever err in giving glory to God.* But if you arrogate any good thing to yourselves, you will rob God; and, in robbing him, you will eventually, and to your utter ruin, rob yourselves!

***~~#2359~~***

***~~REGENERATION—ITS AUTHOR, MEANS, AND END~~***

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

"He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first-fruits of all he created."

There is an evil in the world so monstrous and so horrible, that one can scarcely conceive how it would ever be committed; namely, the ascribing unto God our own iniquities, and tracing them to him as their proper author! Yet this is the common refuge of sinners; who, when led captive by their own lusts, excuse themselves by averring, that no criminality can attach to the indulgence of passions which God himself has given them. But James protests against this impiety, and declares, that "God tempts no man; but that every man who yields to temptation, is drawn away and enticed by his own lust, verse 13, 14."

Another evil also he sets himself to counteract, namely, the tracing of good to ourselves, as though it originated with us as its proper authors. This, though it does not shock our feelings so much as the former does—yet is of the same nature with it, and no less offensive in the sight of God: for, while the former sentiment makes God the cause of evil, the latter denies him to be the cause of good.

On this subject also James rectifies our views; assuring us, that, as all light proceeds from the sun, so does "every good and perfect gift come down from above, even from God the Father of lights." We may indeed have great changes, as from day to night, or from summer to winter: but these arise from ourselves only; for "with him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning;" and, if we have less abundant communications from him at one time than another, it is owing to the change of our position with respect to him, and to our temporary departure from him.

If, on the contrary, a spiritual change has taken place in any of us, so that we have been born again, it is because "he begat us with the word of truth;" and begat us, not on account of any merit in us, but purely "of his own will," and "to the praise of the glory of his own grace."

In this assertion of the Apostle the whole subject of regeneration or conversion comes before us: and we shall be led to mark,

***~~I. The source from whence regeneration flows—~~***

***~~Regeneration is not from man—~~***

Man has neither power nor inclination to convert himself truly and thoroughly to God. If only we consider what is said in the Scriptures respecting the extreme weakness of man in relation to everything that is spiritually good—that "without Christ he can do nothing;" that "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Spirit;" and that "we are not of ourselves sufficient even to think anything that is good;" that our sufficiency even for that is of God alone—how can it be thought that we would be able to "put off the old man and to put on the new," and to "renew ourselves in the spirit of our minds after the image of our God in righteousness and true holiness?"

The very terms in which this change is spoken of, as a resurrection, a new birth, a new creation, clearly import, that it is beyond the power of man to effect it in himself. We need go no further than to the image used in the text itself, to show the utter absurdity of any such idea.

Nor have any others a power to effect it in us: for man can only address himself to our outward senses: he has no access whatever to our hearts; he can therefore never accomplish in us so great a work, as that of "giving us a new heart, and renewing a right spirit within us."

Nor has any man the inclination thus to renew himself. Let us look around, and see what is the state of mankind at large. Are they mourning over their degeneracy and corruption? Are they panting after holiness? Are they using the means which are confessedly within their reach? Are they thankful for every aid they can receive, and for every instruction by which their good desires may be furthered? If you think they are, take your Bible with you, and go to all your neighbors and offer your assistance to them, and solicit a reciprocal aid from them: act as if you all were shipwrecked, and all were anxious for their own personal welfare, and for the welfare of those around them. Do this, and you will soon see how much inclination men have for a thorough conversion of their souls to God.

***~~Regeneration is from God, and from God alone—~~***

This we are not left to determine by any fallible reasonings of our own: it is decided for us by God himself; who, speaking of all who received the Lord Jesus Christ, and thereby received power to become the sons of God, says, "They were born, not of blood (or in consequence of their descent from any particular parents), nor of the will of the flesh (that is, from any good desires of their own), nor of the will of man (that is, from the kind efforts of others), but of God, [John 1:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.12-13)."

It is God alone who makes one to differ from another, 1 Corinthians 4:7; it is "God alone who gives us either to will, or to do, [Philippians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.13)," what is good: and "He who is the Author, is also the Finisher, [Hebrews 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.2).

But as God is pleased to use means and instruments in this work, I will proceed to show,

***~~II. The means by which regeneration is effected—~~***

It does not befit us to restrict God in the use of means. We know that he frequently makes use of affliction, and of conduct; and we will not presume to say that he never employs even dreams or visions for the attainment of his ends: we know assuredly that he has done so in former times; and therefore he may do so at this time (we confess, however, that we are not partial to anything arising out of such means: we are always fearful that they will outcome in something transient and delusive: we prefer infinitely what proceeds from causes more rational, and more tangible, and more consonant with the dispensation under which we live); but we are not at liberty to limit God to any particular mode of communicating his blessings to mankind.

Of one thing however we are sure (and that will effectually cut off all occasion for enthusiastic delusions); namely, that whatever means God makes use of to bring the soul to a consideration of its state, it is "by the word of truth" alone that he savingly converts people to himself. By other means he may call our attention to the word; but by the word only does he guide us to the knowledge of his truth, and to the attainment of his salvation.

***~~By the Word, he begins the good work within us—~~***

It is from the Word alone that we attain the knowledge of our fallen state.

From the Word alone can we learn the way of salvation through the crucified Redeemer.

From the Word alone can we derive encouragement to lay hold on the hope that is set before us.

***~~By the Word also he carries the good work on, and perfects it, within us—~~***

"The Word is that unadulterated milk by which the new-born babes must grow, [1 Peter 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.2)." And, whatever degrees of sanctification are produced in us at a more advanced period, they are effected by the same divine instrument; as Paul has said: "Christ 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, [Ephesians 5:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.26-27)."

Hence our blessed Lord, when praying for his Church, said, "Sanctify them through your truth—your word is truth, [John 17:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.17)." Not that the word has this power in itself: for thousands both hear and read it without deriving any benefit from it to their souls. It is "the sword of the Spirit, [Ephesians 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.17);" and effects no more than what He who wields it sees fit to accomplish. If it "comes in word only," it is of no weight at all: but when it "comes in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 1 Thessalonians 1:5; [1 Thessalonians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.13)," then "it effects all for which God himself has sent it, [Isaiah 55:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.10-11);" and "through him is mighty to the pulling down of all the strongholds, [2 Corinthians 10:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 10.4-5)" of sin and Satan.

Thus is the whole work of grace wrought within us: and a blessed work it will appear, while we show,

***~~III. The end for which regeneration is wrought—~~***

The contemplation of this may well reconcile us to all that has been said about the sovereign will of God. The ground on which men are so jealous of the Divine sovereignty is, that they think it leads to a disregard of holiness; since, if God has chosen men to salvation, they shall attain it without holiness; and if he has not chosen them to salvation, they can never be saved, however holy they may be.

This is altogether an erroneous statement. God is not so regardless of holiness as this supposes: on the contrary, if he elects any, it is "that they may be holy, and without blame before him in love, [Ephesians 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.4);" and, if "he begets any with the word of truth," it is "that we may be to him a kind of first-fruits of his creatures". The "first-fruits" were, by God's own appointment, holy; so that every one was bound to consecrate them unto him, [Deuteronomy 18:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 18.4).

In like manner are God's people to be holy, and altogether devoted to his service. They are on no account to imagine themselves at their own disposal, "They are God's; and must glorify him with their body and their spirit, which are his, [1 Corinthians 6:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.19-20)."

It is not to salvation alone that God ordains his people; but to sanctification, as the way to, and the preparation for, the blessedness of Heaven, [2 Thessalonians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.13). "He has chosen them out of the world, [John 15:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.19)," from which "they are to be separated, [2 Corinthians 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.17)," as the first-fruits are from the remainder of the harvest. Being "a chosen generation, they are to be a peculiar people [2 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.9)," "zealous for good works, [Titus 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.14)." To this "the word of truth" bears testimony in every part. To think that God would "beget" any person by his word and Spirit, and leave him at liberty to be a servant of sin and Satan, is a thought from which one revolts with utter abhorrence.

Thus at least did Paul: "Is Christ the minister of sin? God forbid! [Galatians 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.17)." "Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid! [Romans 6:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.15)." "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid! [Romans 6:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.1-2)." "God has not called us unto impurity, but unto holiness:" and, whatever men may say respecting God's "will" in ordaining us to life, or respecting our relation to him as his children, "begotten of him," this is a truth that must never for one moment be questioned, "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord! [Hebrews 12:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.14)."

***~~See then that you,~~***

***~~1. Value the ordinances of God—~~***

The word is doubtless to be read with care and diligence at home: for, as we have said, it is the food of God's new-born offspring, and the great medium by which he communicates his blessings to the soul. But it is through the ministry of that word that God chiefly works. He will bless those who read it in their own houses: but he will bless also, and more abundantly, those who at the same time attend upon the ministry of it by those whom he has sent to speak in his name.

Let not any think light of the ordinances, because the persons who dispense them are weak as other men: for "God has put his treasure into earthen vessels, on purpose that the excellency of the power may the more manifestly appear to be of him." If indeed men look to the instrument, they will meet with nothing but disappointment. But if they will look through the instrument to God, they shall find the "word as living and powerful, [Hebrews 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.12)" as ever, and shall experience it to be "the power of God unto their everlasting salvation! [Romans 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.16)." There is no blessing which God will not dispense to them by means of it. Nor, if only they mix faith with what they hear, [Hebrews 4:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.2), shall their most enlarged expectations of "profit" ever be disappointed.

***~~2. Labor to improve them for their destined end—~~***

Sanctification, as you have heard, is that for which both the word and ordinances are to be improved. Examine then yourselves by what you hear, that you may find out every defect in your obedience; and keep in remembrance both the precepts and examples that are set before you, so that you may attain to the highest degrees of holiness, and "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God, [Colossians 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 4.12)." You know, that to appropriate any of the first-fruits to a common use would have been sacrilege. Beware then lest the world rob God of any measure of those services which are due to him alone. You are to be his wholly and altogether: "your bodies are to be his," and "your members instruments of righteousness unto him, [Romans 6:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.13)." Your souls, with all their faculties, are to be his also; his *temple*, wherein he is to reside; his *throne*, wherein he is to reign. "Your whole body, soul, and spirit are to be sanctified wholly unto him [1 Thessalonians 5:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.23);" you are to be altogether "a living sacrifice unto him:" and this is no other than "your reasonable service, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1)."

And, as it is by this only that you can make a due improvement of ordinances, so it is by this only that you can have in your own souls any evidence that you are born of God. As for others, they can form no judgment at all of you, but by your works. The rule for them to judge by, is this: "He who commits sin is of the devil: whoever is born of God does not commit sin; for his seed, namely, the Word of God, abides in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God, [1 John 3:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.8-9). "The seed" in this passage means the word: see [1 Peter 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.23) and [1 John 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.14)."

Press forward then for the highest attainments, that, "being blameless and harmless, and without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, you may shine as lights in the world, and approve yourselves indeed to be the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty, [Philippians 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.15-16)."

***~~#2360~~***

***~~THE REWARD OF OBEYING THE GOSPEL~~***

***~~[James 1:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.25)~~***

"But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does."

A mere *profession*of religion without the *practice*of it, will avail us nothing. As obvious as this truth is, it needs to be frequently insisted on. Even in the Apostle's days there were many who "professed to know God, while in works they denied him." James wrote his epistle with a more immediate view to such persons. He tells them plainly that they only "deceive their own selves, verse 22;" but affirms with equal confidence that the practical Christian shall be blessed.

We shall consider,

***~~I. James' description of the Gospel—~~***

The Gospel is generally thought to be a mere system of restraints, but:

***~~The gospel is, in truth, a "law of liberty"—~~***

It finds us under a worse than Egyptian bondage; and proclaims liberty from our oppressive yoke, [Isaiah 61:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 61.1). It offers pardon to those who are under the condemnation of the law; and freedom from sin to those over whom it has had dominion. It rescues us from the captivity in which *Satan*has held us; it breaks the fetters whereby the *world*has retained its ascendency over us; and opens the way for the unrestrained observance of holy duties.

The gospel is to captive sinners, what the jubilee-trumpet was to the enslaved Jews, [Leviticus 25:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 25.9-10); and effects for the imprisoned soul what the angel wrought for Peter, [Acts 12:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 12.7-10). This liberty however it proclaims with the authority of a "law." It does not merely offer what we may alter or reject: it is properly called by the Apostle "the law of faith." It prescribes the only possible method of obtaining salvation; it declares that all attempts to find out another will be vain, [1 Corinthians 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.11); and it enjoins us to embrace this at the peril of our souls, [1 John 3:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.23).

***~~The gospel is justly called a "perfect" law of liberty—~~***

Nothing can be added to it to render it more effectual: neither ceremonial nor moral duties can at all improve Christ's finished work, [Galatians 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.2); [Galatians 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.4).

The gospel will be utterly made void also, if anything be taken from it. The blood of Christ, not any work of ours, must be regarded as the price of our redemption, [1 Peter 1:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.18-19); and the liberty itself must be received as the gift of God through faith, [Ephesians 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.8).

The Gospel is perfect also with respect to its effects upon the conscience. The Mosaic sacrifices were little more than remembrances of sins, [Hebrews 10:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.3); but in the Gospel we have a sacrifice that takes away our sin, [John 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.29). The soul, once purged by the Redeemer's blood, is cleansed forever, [Hebrews 10:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.14); and, once freed by his almighty grace, is free indeed, [John 8:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.36).

This beautiful view of the Gospel will easily account for,

***~~II. The regard which the Christian pays to the gospel—~~***

A man immured in a dungeon, would not treat with indifference a proclamation of pardon; nor can he who is in earnest about salvation, disregard the Gospel:

***~~He endeavors to understand the gospel—~~***

He does not inspect it to gratify a foolish curiosity: he searches into it with care and diligence. Like the Bereans of old, he maturely weighs its declarations, [Acts 17:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.11), and "proves all things in it, that he may hold fast that which is good." Even the angels themselves desire to investigate its mysteries: much more does he, who feels so great an interest in its contents.

Nor does he do this in a transient manner, but with persevering diligence.

***~~He labors also to obey the gospel—~~***

What he hears or reads is not allowed to escape his memory: he at least "gives earnest heed to it, lest at any time he would let it slip." He cannot be satisfied to "see his face in a looking-glass, and presently to forget what manner of man he was, verse 23, 24." *He desires to have the word engraved on his heart, and transcribed into his life.*When he hears of liberty, he feels a solicitude to obtain it; or, having obtained it, he strives to honor his almighty Deliverer. He is well aware that his pretensions to faith must be supported by a suitable life and conduct, [James 2:17-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.17-20); and it is his determination, through grace, to show forth his faith by his works.

That he does not find it vain to serve God, will appear by considering,

***~~III. The reward which he ensures to himself thereby—~~***

The world supposes that the service of God is irksome and unprofitable; but the Christian can attest the contrary from his own experience.

***~~In the very act of obeying the gospel he finds a rich reward—~~***

He can adopt, in reference to the law, the declaration of Paul, [Romans 7:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.22). However strict the commandments are, he does not account them grievous, [1 John 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.3); on the contrary, he feels "the ways of religion to be pleasantness and peace, [Proverbs 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.17)." His deliverance from impetuous passions is no small source of happiness: his exercise of benevolent affections greatly tranquillizes his mind, [Isaiah 32:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 32.17). The testimony of his own conscience is a rich and continual feast, [2 Corinthians 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.12).

Moreover God himself will grant to him delightful tokens of his approbation. He will shed abroad his love in the hearts of his faithful servants. He will lift upon them the light of his applauding countenance; and "seal them with the Spirit of promise, as the pledge of their inheritance." Thus, in the most literal sense, is that expression realized, "By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward, [Psalm 19:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 19.11)," and the description, alluded to in the text, is abundantly verified in [Psalm 1:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 1.1-3), "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers."

***~~A still more glorious recompense also awaits him in the future world—~~***

Many are extremely cautious of asserting this truth. They are afraid lest they would be thought to be advocates for the doctrine of human merit; but *there is no truth more clear than that our works shall be rewarded*, [Romans 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.6). Nor does this at all interfere with the doctrines of grace. Our persons and our services are equally accepted only through Christ, [1 Peter 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.5), and our happiness will be altogether the gift of God for his sake: but our works will assuredly be the measure of our reward, [1 Corinthians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.8), and we may with propriety be stimulated by the hope of a future recompense, [Hebrews 11:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.26). Let the Christian then know, that not the basest of his services shall be forgotten, [Matthew 10:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.42); but that his weight of glory shall be proportioned to his services, 2 Corinthians 4:17.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. The inconsiderate hearers—~~***

It is obvious that many hear the word without receiving any saving benefit. This is owing to their own carelessness and inattention. They are like the wayside hearers, from whom Satan catches away the word, [Matthew 13:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.19); but such hearers do not merely lose the blessings which the faithful Christian obtains. If the word is not "a savor of life, it becomes a savor of death, to their souls." O that all would remember the admonition once given to the Jews, [John 12:48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.48). Thus would they know the truth, and the truth would make them free, [John 8:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.32).

***~~2. The practical hearers—~~***

You have been brought from bondage to liberty, from darkness to light; and, doubtless, you experience the blessedness of doing the will of God. "Stand fast then in the liberty with which Christ has made you free;" "and be not entangled again with any yoke of bondage." Show that you consider God's service as perfect freedom. Seek to have your very "thoughts brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, [2 Corinthians 10:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 10.5)." Thus shall your "peace flow down like a river;" and abundant treasures be laid up for you in the heavenly kingdom! [Matthew 6:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.20).

***~~#2361~~***

***~~SELF-DECEIT EXPOSED~~***

***~~[James 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.26)~~***

"If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless!"

If there are persons in the present day who pervert the doctrines of the Gospel, and take occasion from them to depreciate morality, we must not wonder at it, since this evil prevailed to a very great extent even in the apostolic age. It was with a view to persons of this description chiefly that James wrote this practical and admonitory epistle. It is evident that the Christian temper was too much overlooked by many who professed themselves followers of Christ. There were *many who loved to hear the Gospel, but neglected to comply with its injunctions.* In particular, they would give a very undue license to their tongues, indulging themselves in most uncharitable censures of others; while in the opinion of their own party, and in their own estimation, they stood high as "saints of the Lord." But, in the words which we have read, the Apostle James declared plainly to them, that they "deceived their own souls," and that "their religion was vain."

In this declaration we may see,

***~~I. The proper office of religion in the soul—~~***

True religion is not intended to fill the mind with mere notions, but to regulate the heart and life.

***~~1. As admitted into the soul, the gospel brings us under the authority of God's law—~~***

Previous to our reception of the Gospel, we know no other rule of conduct than that of our own will, or the opinions of the world around us. But when we have "received the truth as it is in Jesus," we see that God is a Sovereign who must be obeyed; and that his law is to be a rule of action to all his creatures. *His law extends not to outward actions only, but to the thoughts and desires of the heart*; over which it exercises a complete control. We now begin to see that the requirements of that law, in their utmost extent, are all "holy, and just, and good;" precisely such as it befit Jehovah to enact, and such as it is our truest happiness to obey. The mere circumstance that it has been spoken by the Lord, is quite sufficient to give it, in all cases, a paramount authority: nor are the customs or opinions of the whole world, however long or universally established, accounted of any weight in opposition to it.

***~~2. As operating in the soul, the gospel disposes and qualifies us to obey that law—~~***

*The Gospel savingly received, does not merely convince the judgment, but engages the affections; and at the same time that it gives a new taste, it imparts a vital energy*; whereby we are enabled 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." It is an engine of vast power: it is "mighty through God to the pulling down of the strongholds of sin and Satan: it casts down all towering imaginations, and everything that exalts itself against the knowledge of God; and brings into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ 2 Corinthians 10:4-5."

Now all this is implied in the text. It is taken for granted, that the gospel, duly operating, will enable us to "bridle the tongue." But, to regulate the tongue, we must of necessity "keep and rectify the heart," since "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks! [Matthew 12:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.34)." If therefore the not bridling of the tongue argues our religion to be vain, it is evident, that *the proper office of the gospel is to bring the whole soul into subjection to God's Word, and to render us progressively conformed to the perfect example of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*It will make us to aspire after this, and to strive for it, and in a considerable measure to attain it. I say, in a considerable measure; because perfection, sinless perfection, is not to be attained by such corrupt and feeble creatures as we.

"The wildest beasts have been so tamed as almost to have changed their nature: but no man can tame the tongue, [James 3:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.7-8)," so as never in any instance to offend with it. Not even Moses, or Job, or Paul, attained such perfection as that.

But still, as to any predominant habit of sin, we shall be delivered from it, if we are truly upright before God; and shall be enabled to say with David, "I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle," when most tempted and provoked to speak unadvisedly with my lips [Psalm 39:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 39.1).

From hence we can be at no loss to determine,

***~~II. The state of those in whom the gospel's appropriate influence is not found—~~***

The declaration in our text may be accounted harsh; and particularly as made to persons who were considered as eminent in the Church of Christ. But it is true; and must be delivered, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear. Mark,

***~~1. What is here supposed—~~***

It is supposed that a man may seem to others to be religious, and may be fully persuaded in his own mind that he is so; and yet have so little government of his tongue, as to prove that he deceives his own heart, and that his religion is vain. And is this a supposition that is not warranted in fact? Would to God it were so! But we can know very little of the Christian world, divided as it is into innumerable sects and parties, and not know, that the most prominent in every sect have been but too ready to condemn each other, and oftentimes with an acrimony which has shown clearly enough under whose malignant influence they were.

A little difference of sentiment about certain doctrines (though not of primary or fundamental importance), or about matters of discipline only (which are confessedly less plainly revealed in the Gospel), have been sufficient, and still are, to rend the seamless garment of Christ into ten thousand pieces, and to fill with mutual enmity whole communities who profess to have embraced a religion of love.

Nor is it in this respect only that the Christian world are liable to the reproof given in our text. *The pride, and conceit, and vanity, of many professors proclaim to the whole world how destitute they are of true humility, and consequently of true religion.*Their envious surmisings too, their uncharitable censures, their vindictive recriminations; alas! there are scarcely any persons more guilty of these things than blind bigots and party zealots, and talkative professors.

Shall I mention the license which many give to their tongue, in ungoverned anger, in palpable falsehood, in shameless impurity? Ah! tell it not in Gath; publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon: such are the defects of many who yet stand fair with the Christian world, and would think themselves greatly injured, if their piety were held in doubt.

It is plain that such things existed in the Apostle's days; and we flatter ourselves too much, if we think that the Church is a whit purer in the present day. There ever were, and there still are, "tares growing with the wheat;" and they must be left to God, who alone can make the separation.

***~~2. What is here asserted—~~***

The religion of such persons, however eminent they may be in the estimation of themselves or others, is altogether "vain," for it will neither be accepted of God, nor be of any avail for the salvation of their souls. *God cannot accept it, because he looks at the heart. External forms, or strong professions, cannot deceive him.*"He requires truth in the inward parts:" and forms his estimate of men by the conformity of their hearts to his word and will. To what purpose will it be that we cry, "*Lord, Lord!* If we do not the things which he commands?"

We are told by Paul to what a height of religion men may apparently attain, even "exercising a faith that can move mountains, and speaking as with the tongues of angels, and giving all their goods to feed the poor, yes and their bodies also to be burned—and yet be no better before God than sounding brass or tinkling cymbals! [1 Corinthians 13:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.1-3)."

Let those who have not the government of the tongue attend to this. The lack of that self-command argues a radical lack of the vital principle of Christian love: and the lack of that principle vitiates all that we can either do or suffer, and renders it of no value in the sight of God. He has warned us beforehand, that "he will take account even of *every idle word*that we speak, [Matthew 12:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.36)," and much more of every *uncharitable*word; and that "by our words we shall be justified, and by our words we shall be condemned, [Matthew 12:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.37)."

***~~In reflecting on this subject, we cannot but observe,~~***

***~~1. In what an awful state they must be, who have not even the appearance of saving religion—~~***

I know that persons who have no desire after vital godliness will bless themselves because they are not hypocrites. But is it to the credit of any, that they do not even pretend to have the fear of God in their hearts? Is it to the credit of any, that while they name the name of Christ, they do not so much as profess to depart from iniquity, or to take his yoke upon them? What is this boast, but an avowed acknowledgment that they are:  
rebels against God,  
violators of his laws,  
haters of his Christ,  
and despisers of his salvation!

Go on then, and glory that you are not hypocrites; though it were easy enough to prove that you are the basest hypocrites, because you profess yourselves Christians, and would be indignant with any one who would dispute your title to Christian ordinances and Christian burial, while *you give the lie to that profession by the whole tenor of your life and conduct*; I say, go on, and glory that you are not hypocrites. Then you shall not be condemned as *hypocrites*. But you are *rebels*; and, as rebels, you shall be condemned: and that Savior whom you now despise, will shortly say, "Bring hither my enemies, who would not have me reign over them, and slay them before me." Yes, truly, if those who have so much religion as to stand high in the estimation of the Christian Church on account of it, may yet deceive themselves, and have their religion vain, much more must you deceive yourselves, if you hope to escape the judgments of God in the eternal world. If their religion will not save them, much less will your irreligion save you. Repent then, and turn unto your God in sincerity and truth.

Yet look not to your reformation to save you, but to the Lord Jesus Christ, who expiated your guilt by his own blood, and offers you by my mouth the forgiveness of your sins. As an ambassador from him, I beseech you in his stead, be reconciled to God. Then shall not only your "sins be blotted out as a cloud," but your very love of sin shall be subdued and mortified by his Spirit and grace; so that the fountain which has hitherto emitted so much that was impure, shall henceforth flow in endless streams of praise to your redeeming God! [James 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.11).

***~~2. What need the professors of religion have of vigilance and care—~~***

You see in *others*how difficult it is to have the full government of the tongue. Know then that the same difficulty exists in relation to yourselves. But in *yourselves*you are apt to overlook it. It is surprising how faulty a religious professor may be in the licence which he allows to his tongue, while he is not conscious of any fault at all, or perhaps takes credit to himself for his fidelity and zeal. But, when you hear how fatally you may deceive your own souls, it befits you to be upon your guard, and to pray continually, with David, "Set a guard over my mouth, O LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips! [Psalm 141:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 141.3)." And be not content with abstaining from evil discourse, but let your words be always such as may "minister grace to the hearers, and tend to the use of edifying, [Ephesians 4:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.29)." The power of speech is that which above all others may be employed for the honor of God, and the welfare of your fellow-creatures. In this respect your tongue is "your glory." Bid it then "awake to honor and adore your God, [Psalm 57:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 57.8)." Remember, it is not the talkative professor of religion that is always the most humble or most acceptable in the sight of God. Many of that description there are, who "think themselves to be something, when they are nothing;" and thereby eventually deceive and ruin their own souls, [Galatians 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.3). See especially [Romans 2:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.18-20). Be not of that unhappy number. Be rather "swift to hear, and slow to speak, verse 19." And, if you do stand forward to instruct and benefit others, be doubly careful to set an example of all that you teach, and to let the power of religion appear in the whole of your own spirit and deportment.

***~~#2362~~***

***~~PURE AND UNDEFILED RELIGION DESCRIBED~~***

***~~[James 1:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.27)~~***

"Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world."

Errors of the most fatal kind were early found in the Christian Church. So speedily had vital godliness decayed, that even in the Apostles' days a mere form and profession of religion was deemed sufficient. *Under the idea of exalting faith, the value of good works was depreciated, and the necessity of performing them denied*. Against such errors the Apostle James lifted up his voice like a trumpet: he bore testimony against them in the most energetic manner: he declared that "faith without works was dead, [James 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.20);" that to be "hearers of the word and not doers of it, was the way to deceive our own souls, verse 22;" that the "religion" which did not produce self-government, "was vain, verse 26;" and that religion, which alone God would acknowledge as "pure and undefiled," would lead to the most self-denying exercises of love, and to a freedom from all those corruptions with which the world abounded: "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world."

Let us consider,

***~~I. His description of true religion—~~***

We must remember that the Apostle is here speaking of religion solely in a *practical*view. He is not speaking of *principles*. Not that he disregards them: on the contrary, instead of setting aside the doctrines of justification by faith, as some would represent, he insists on the necessity of faith as strongly as Paul himself; only he distinguishes between that which is living and operative faith, and that which is uninfluential and dead faith. He affirms that it is the living and operative faith only, which will save the soul.

Nor is the whole even of practical religion in the contemplation of the Apostle in this passage. He does not advert to the exercise of our affections towards God, but only to our actions towards men: and it is in this confined view that we must understand him as speaking in the words before us.

He informs us how religion will influence us in reference to,

***~~1. The world at large—~~***

The terms here made use of draw the line with great accuracy. It is not required of us to renounce the world entirely: we are social beings, and have many social duties to perform: and, if we were to abandon society altogether, we would withhold from mankind many benefits which they have a right to expect from us. When God calls us "the salt of the earth," it is necessarily implied that we are to come in contact with that mass, which, by our influence, is to be kept from corruption.

But from "the *corruptions*that are in the world, 2 Peter 1:4." we are to "keep ourselves unspotted." Its pleasures, riches, and honors we are to despise, [1 John 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.15-16), even as our Lord Jesus Christ himself did, [John 17:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.14-16). Nor are we to be conformed to its opinions and habits, [Romans 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.2). Even its friendship we are neither to court nor desire, [James 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.4). If we would approve ourselves Christians indeed, we must feel such an influence from the cross of Christ, as to "be crucified unto the world, and to have the world altogether crucified unto us [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.14)." Thus, though in the world, we shall clearly show that we are not of the world.

***~~2. That part of the world which is destitute and afflicted—~~***

Practical love is the life and soul of religion: and, as it will extend to all in general, so will it manifest itself particularly towards those who are bowed down with affliction. The "visiting" of the afflicted is an office which the true Christian will delight to execute; yet not in a slight and transient manner: he will so interest himself in all their concerns, as to relieve and comfort them to the utmost of his power. His conduct towards them will resemble that of Job, [Job 29:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 29.12-13); [Job 30:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 30.25); [Job 31:16-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 31.16-20). It is the way in which he expresses his obligations to God, [Isaiah 58:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.6-7); and in which he shows his love to his Lord and Savior, [Matthew 25:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.45). He considers love and charity as a commandment stamped with peculiar authority by Christ himself, [John 13:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.34); and, in obedience to it, he desires to "weep with those who weep, as well as to rejoice with those who rejoice, [Romans 12:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.15)." This is "pure and undefiled religion." Other things may pass for religion before men, but this is religion "before God:" it is that which he will acknowledge as agreeable to his will, and will recompense with tokens of his approbation.

This description of religion will probably force from us a tribute of applause: but, instead of bestowing on it empty commendations, it will be proper to consider,

***~~II. The use we are to make of true religion—~~***

The Apostle doubtless designed that we would regard it,

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

"Victory over the world" is one of those marks which are universally found in the Lord's people, and in no others, [1 John 4:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.4-5). Other persons, it is true, may be free from open vices, and, through disappointments and infirmities, may become disgusted with the world: but their love of the world is not at all changed, provided they could have the things on which their hearts are fixed, with health and strength to enjoy them.

A delight in all the offices of love to men for Christ's sake is another mark, whereby Christians are distinguished from all other persons. It is a disposition which springs out of a sense of redeeming love, [1 John 4:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.10-11), and infallibly "accompanies salvation, [Hebrews 6:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.9-10)." The lack of this disposition argues a total absence of divine grace, 1 Corinthians 13:1-3; while the exercise of it warrants an assured confidence in the Divine favor, [1 John 3:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.17-19).

Let us then bring ourselves to this touchstone. Let us ask ourselves, whether we do indeed account it "better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting?" Do we consider ourselves as "pilgrims and sojourners" here on earth? *Do we value our possessions, not so much for the respect or comfort which they procure to ourselves, as for the opportunities they afford us of honoring God and benefitting our fellow-creatures?*

Alas! alas! when estimated according to this rule, how little of "pure and undefiled religion" will be found! This is a melancholy view indeed of the Christian world; but it is the view which God himself gives us of it; and it is in vain for us to controvert it; for by his decision we must stand or fall. See [Matthew 25:34-46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.34-46).

***~~2. As a directory whereby to regulate our conduct—~~***

The commands of God relative to these things are clear and express: "Come out from the world, and be separate, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a father unto you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty, [2 Corinthians 6:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.17-18)." Nor is the law respecting *sympathy*at all less forcibly enjoined: "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ, [Galatians 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.2)."

In a word, I call upon you all to obey these great commands. Remember, it is not to any peculiarities of a sect that we are urging you, but to that which God himself dignifies with the name of "pure and undefiled religion."

Say not, "This is not my office, I cannot thus come out from the world, nor can I thus devote myself to deeds of charity." I readily grant that all cannot consecrate an equal measure of their time or property to these offices: but no man in the universe has any dispensation from devoting such a measure of his time and property to these things as his situation and circumstances will admit of. The command is equally obligatory on all: and a disposition to obey it ought to be equally strong in all. The various modes of our obedience will be judged of by God himself, who alone knows what our respective states and circumstances require. But this I say, "He who sows liberally, shall reap liberally; and he who sows sparingly, shall reap also sparingly."

Respecting the excellence of such religion I dare appeal to your own consciences. See a person, whether of higher or lower rank, laying aside the cares and pleasures of the world, and visiting the abodes of misery: see the disconsolate "widow, and the helpless children," bemoaning their bereavement, while to the anguish occasioned by so severe a loss, the pressure of poverty is added; and, to the lack of immediate sustenance, the prospect of permanent and irremediable distress. See the compassionate visitor opening the sources of consolation which the Gospel affords, until the unhappy sufferers are brought to kiss the rod that smites them. See him administering present relief, and devising means for the future support of the family: how is he received as an angel from Heaven! And how does "the widow's heart even sing with joy," while she acknowledges the hand of God in these supports, and, with feelings too big for utterance, adores her Heavenly Benefactor!

Go beloved, to such scenes as these, and you will soon begin to see the beauty of religion, and to understand that paradox, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Yes, realize one such scene as this, and you will need no further persuasion to assist the charity before us, or to emulate the zeal of those who are most active in it.

***~~#2363~~***

***~~GOD'S SPECIAL REGARD FOR THE POOR~~***

***~~[James 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.5)~~***

"Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?"

*It is a duty incumbent on all ministers to discountenance any errors, whether of faith or practice, that may have crept into the Church.* But when compelled by necessity to reprove what is amiss, they would show by most unquestionable evidence, that there is just occasion for censure; and, by their tender manner of reproving, they would evince that they are actuated only by a sense of duty to God, and of love to man. James had seen a very shameful partiality prevailing in the Church in favor of the rich, while the poor were too generally neglected and despised. Against this great evil he bears his testimony, not merely with fidelity, but with unoffending tenderness, and unanswerable wisdom. His argument is to this effect: Has not God chosen the poor, and selected them as monuments of his love, and as heirs of his glory? With what consistency then can you pour contempt upon them, as though they were unworthy of the smallest attention?

In discoursing upon his words we shall show,

***~~I. What inheritance God has chosen for the poor—~~***

While man is unmindful of the poor, God has exalted them above others in respect of,

***~~1. Their present portion—~~***

Faith is that precious gift which he has bestowed on them: and though few among the rich regret their lack of it—yet is it a most inestimable blessing. The smallest portion of faith is sufficient, provided it be a true and living faith:  
to prove their election of God, [Acts 13:48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.48);  
to secure to them the remission of sins, [Acts 10:43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.43);  
to bring peace into their conscience, [Romans 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.1);  
and to sanctify their hearts [Acts 15:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 15.9).

The smallest portion of saving faith is a peculiar gift bestowed on very few, [Isaiah 53:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.1). [John 12:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.38). [Romans 10:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.16); and one which neither men nor devils ever shall deprive them of [John 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.14). Yet God has not chosen them to enjoy a small portion of it, but "to be rich in faith." He would have them "strong in faith, not staggering at any promise, [Romans 4:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.20)," but "living," both for temporal and spiritual things, altogether "by faith in the Son of God, [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20)," fully assured, that all things needful shall be supplied for their bodies, [Matthew 6:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.33), and that all things shall work together for the good of their souls, [Romans 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.28).

The Levites were not allowed to have any inheritance among their brethren; but the Lord their God was their inheritance, [Numbers 18:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 18.20). [Joshua 13:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 13.33). And this, so far from being a grievance to them, was deemed their highest privilege. Thus privileged are the poor; they have little of this world; but, if they have God for their portion, they are the richest people upon earth!

***~~2. Their eternal inheritance—~~***

God has provided "a kingdom for those who love him:" a kingdom worthy to be possessed by those, whom God delights to honor. And it is his will that "the poor of this world" would not only aspire after it, but consider themselves as "heirs" to it. While they are destitute, perhaps, of food to eat, or of clothing to put on—he would have them like minors that are heirs to a large estate, who delight to survey the grounds which they are speedily to possess. He would have them survey all the glory of Heaven, and say, "That is my patrimony: the instant I attain the age appointed by my Father's will, I shall have a host of angels sent to bear me on their wings to the mansions prepared for me!"

To vindicate the ways of God, we shall proceed to show,

***~~II. Why he has chosen this portion for the poor in particular—~~***

***~~That God has chosen this portion for the poor is beyond a doubt—~~***

If the Apostle had only affirmed it, no room would have been left for doubt; but he ventured to appeal even to the rich themselves respecting it, and that too at the very time that he was reproving them for their contempt of the poor; yes, he even grounded the reproof itself upon that very appeal. He could not possibly express more strongly his own persuasion of the truth in question. But it is capable of abundant proof both from Scripture and experience.

Who were the people that received the testimony of our blessed Lord? "Did any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believe on him? [John 7:48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.48)." Who constituted the great majority of the Church in the apostolic age? Paul informs us, "You see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God has chosen the foolish, the weak, the base, the despised, yes, and things which are not, to bring to nothing things that are, [1 Corinthians 1:26-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.26-28)."

Just so, we might appeal to you at this day: Who are they that crowd the churches where the Gospel is preached, notwithstanding they meet with the same contemptuous treatment that the Apostle so justly complains of. How many will open their pews to a rich or well-dressed person, that would allow a poor man, however pious or infirm, to "stand" during the whole service, without ever offering him a seat, when they had room enough to accommodate many! Yes, how many rich persons will absent themselves from the ordinances, and lock up their pews, to prevent their being occupied! What would James have said to these things? See verse 2-4, 9.

Who are they that "receive the word with meekness, and have it engrafted" in their hearts, and exemplified in their lives? Are these the rich? A few there may be; but it is "to the poor chiefly that the Gospel is preached, [Matthew 11:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.5)," and it is "the common people that hear it gladly, [Mark 12:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 12.37)."

***~~Nor are we at a loss to assign reasons for this procedure—~~***

God has thus distinguished the poor, in order to stain the pride of man. Men, if they are exalted above their fellow-creatures in wealth or dignity, are ready to conceive that they are as great in the eyes of God as they are in their own eyes. They think themselves (I had almost said) above God himself. They are too wise to learn from God, and too great to be controlled by him. God therefore pours contempt on them, as they do on him, [1 Samuel 2:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.30). He will let them see that their possessions or endowments, however great, are not a child's portion, but only as *crumbs cast to the dogs*. He will render the poor as superior to them in spiritual things, as they are to the poor in temporal things: he will "lift up the beggar from the dunghill, and set him among the princes, [1 Samuel 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.8)," while he casts down the mighty from their thrones to the lowest abyss of shame and misery.

Moreover, in*thus distinguishing the poor, God further designs to magnify the riches of his own grace*. If God bestowed his favors principally on the rich, we would be ready to think that they had some peculiar claim upon him, and that his attention to them was no more than their due: or perhaps we would rather conclude, that their superior talents enabled them to unravel the divine mysteries, and to attain Heaven by their own unassisted efforts. But when we see the Gospel "hidden from the wise and prudent, and revealed to babes, [Matthew 11:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.25)," then *we are constrained to acknowledge the marvelous condescension, and uncontrollable sovereignty, of our God.*

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who despise the portion that God has chosen—~~***

It is to be lamented that many even among the poor themselves are regardless of the "true riches, [2 Corinthians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.10)." But what madness is it to reject that which would assuage all their present sorrows; and to render themselves infinitely more destitute in the next world than they are in this! O that they would accept the portion that God offers them!

The rich too almost universally despise the Gospel. But how painful will their reflections be in that day when the parable of Dives and Lazarus shall be realized in them! O consider, you are not excluded; God is willing to bestow the same inestimable blessings upon you. Seek then to be rich in faith, and Heaven itself shall be your everlasting inheritance.

***~~2. Those who desire to possess that portion—~~***

Blessed be God, there are some among the poor that know and enjoy their privileges. But whence is it that they discern what is hidden from others? Had they anything in themselves more than others, "anything which they have not received?" No! [1 Corinthians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.7); they would never have chosen God, if God had not first "chosen" them, [John 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.16). Let them then adore that grace which has been thus magnified towards them!

Do any of the rich inquire, What shall we do to get a share in this inheritance? Shall we cast away all our riches, and reduce ourselves to poverty? No; there is an infinitely better and safer way, "Love God." You may give away all your goods, and be nothing profited, 1 Corinthians 13:3. Thrice is this expressly repeated in that fore-cited passage, [1 Corinthians 1:26-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.26-28); but if you "love God, the kingdom is absolutely promised to you." The poor cannot be saved unless they be rich in faith: and you, if you exercise faith and love towards our adorable Savior, shall also be saved with an everlasting salvation!

***~~#2364~~***

***~~THE LAW OF LIBERTY~~***

**[James 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.12)**

"So speak and so do, as those who shall be judged by the law of liberty."

The law of works contained in the Ten Commandments is continued in force under the Gospel dispensation, as a rule of life. This appears from the frequent reference which is made to it in the New Testament in this particular view. Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, when inculcating the duty of love, says, "Owe no man anything, but to love one another: for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.…for love is the fulfilling of the law, [Romans 13:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 13.8-10)." In like manner James, condemning an undue respect of persons which had obtained to a great extent in the Christian Church, says, "If you have respect to persons, you commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors, verse 9."

The difference which exists between the Law and the Gospel, is not that the Gospel dispenses with anything which the law had enjoined, but that it requires the same things in a different manner; the law inculcating them as the means of obtaining life; the Gospel requiring them as the means of honoring God, and of manifesting that life which God has already imparted to the soul.

The law in its requirements begets a spirit of bondage: but the Gospel, while its requirements are the same, operates as "a law of liberty;" inspiring us with motives of a more sincere kind, and at the same time *imparting to the believer such powerful assistance as renders obedience easy and delightful*. Hence the Apostle, showing that the conduct which he was reproving was condemned by the Gospel no less than by the law, (for the Gospel itself declares, that "he shall have judgment without mercy, who has shown no mercy, verse 13,") entreats the whole Christian Church "so to speak, and so to act, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty."

Now in these words we see,

***~~I. The true character of the Gospel—~~***

It is a law, and has all the force of a law, and must be obeyed on pain of God's heavy displeasure; but it is "a law of liberty:" and this it is,

***~~1. As freeing men from the guilt of sin—~~***

The Gospel proclaims, to all who receive it, pardon and peace. It holds forth a Savior, who has bought us with his blood, and by the sacrifice of himself has effected our reconciliation with the offended Majesty of Heaven. It declares, that "by receiving that Savior," however guilty we may have been in times past, "we shall have the privilege of becoming the sons of God, [John 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.12)."

In this it differs widely from the law: the law knew nothing of pardon: it simply said, "Do this, and live:" and if in one single instance it was violated, all hopes of acceptance by it were destroyed forever. Compare, verse 10 with [Galatians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.10). A certain kind of forgiveness indeed was obtained by the offering of certain sacrifices: but it was only such a measure of it as exempted the person from present punishment, but could never procure acceptance for him in the eternal world; and hence, as "it could never really take away sins," it could "never make any man perfect as pertaining to the conscience, [Hebrews 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.9); [Hebrews 10:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.1-4)." Moreover, there were some sins for which no sacrifice whatever could be received. But the Gospel offers a full and everlasting remission from all sins, and declares, that "all who believe, are justified from all things, even from those from which they could never (even in appearance) be justified by the law of Moses, [Acts 13:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.39)." Thus by announcing to the whole world, that "there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, [Romans 8:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.1)," the Gospel may justly be called "A law of liberty."

***~~2. As freeing men from the power of sin—~~***

The promise which the Gospel makes to all who truly receive it, is this, "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, while it gives this assurance to its votaries, it imparts to them the power of carrying it into effect. The person who is united unto Christ by living faith, is like a scion, which when engrafted into a tree, lives by virtue derived from the tree, and is enabled from that time to bring forth its appropriate fruits. Our Lord in this view says, "I am the vine; you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit: for without me, or separate from me, you can do nothing, [John 15:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.1); [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.5)."

In this again the Gospel differs widely from the law: for, *while the law issued its commands, it imparted no power to obey them: but the Gospel conveys to the soul of the believer such a measure of strength, as enables it to mortify sin, and to abound in all the fruits of righteousness to the praise and glory of God*. This is what Paul expressly tells us: "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, that is, the Gospel, (which James in nearly similar terms calls 'the law of liberty,') has made me free from the law of sin and death: for what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh; God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, has done; that is, he has condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit, [Romans 8:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.2-4)."

I may add, that the Gospel gives us a more liberal spirit, in that it does not force us to do what is hateful to us, but disposes us willingly to take upon us the yoke of Christ, and renders "his yoke easy, and his burden light." The current of a believer's affections is changed by it, [Colossians 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.2); so that, though he still feels the workings of corruption strong within him, he "delights in the law of God after his inward man, [Romans 7:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.22)," and "has his conduct in Heaven," as the unbeliever has on earth, [Philippians 3:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.19-20).

Thus does "the law of faith [Romans 3:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.27)" "make men free [John 8:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.32);" and "the liberty which they receive from Christ renders them free indeed, [John 8:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.36)."

The Apostle, in calling men's attention to the law of liberty, marks,

***~~II. Our duty in relation to it—~~***

If we have been made free by the Gospel, we are bound to regard it,

***~~1. As our rule of conduct here—~~***

The substance of all its commands is comprehended in one word, Love. As he who loves fulfills the law, so he who loves fulfills the Gospel also; as Paul has said, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ, [Galatians 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.2)." But here we must particularly observe that our obedience to this law is not restricted to overt acts: our whole spirit must accord with it, and be molded by it. If we notice the particular conduct which the Apostle reproves, we shall find, that it was not such as would have brought down censure from the world at large: it would rather have been commended as a respect due to the higher orders of society. But, when strictly examined, it was contrary to the principle of love: and that was quite sufficient to render it an object of severest reprobation.

"So in everything, do unto others what you would have them do unto you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets, [Matthew 7:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.12)." This forms the proper standard for our conduct towards all mankind: and if, either in word or deed, we deviate from that, we transgress that holy law which we are bound to obey. How far this heavenly principle extends, may be seen in the description given of it by Paul: and, if we do not in the constant habit of our minds endeavor to attain it, we may believe what we will, and do what we will, and suffer what we may—but, after all, we shall be only "as sounding brass, and as tinkling cymbals, [1 Corinthians 13:1-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.1-7).

***~~2. As God's rule of judgment hereafter—~~***

By this law we shall be judged in the last day. It is remarkable, that in the account which our Lord gives us of the final judgment, there is no mention made of any actual transgression as determining the fate of the ungodly. Their performance of the offices of love is the only subject of inquiry; and their neglect of them is the only ground that is specified for their eternal condemnation, [Matthew 25:34-46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.34-46). Of course, I must not be understood to say, that this will really be the only subject of inquiry, or the only ground of a sinner's condemnation; for no doubt the whole of men's lives will be taken into the account in fixing their eternal destiny. But it is the only thing mentioned by our Lord in his account of that day: and this is sufficient to show us the vast importance of keeping it ever in our view. We must attend to it no less in our words, than in our actions; and "so speak, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty."

That we may bring home this subject more powerfully to your hearts, we would entreat you to bear in mind the main points contained in it:

***~~Remember—~~***

***~~1. The true nature of the Gospel—~~***

Men universally conceive of the Gospel as a system of restraints: and when we call upon them to obey the Gospel, they consider us as attempting to abridge their liberty. But the very reverse of this is true. *We find men slaves to the world, and sin, and Satan; and we come to break their chains, and to set them at liberty!*Our blessed Lord proclaimed this as the great object of his mission, "to preach deliverance to the captives, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, [Luke 4:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.18-19)."

There are now, as there were in the Jewish state, many who love their bonds, and account the service of their master preferable to the liberty that is proclaimed. But this does not at all change the nature of the Gospel, which is altogether "a law of liberty" to all who truly embrace it. Do not then imagine, that, when we would induce you to renounce all the lords that have had dominion over you, we would bring you into bondage, or deprive you of anything that will conduce to your real happiness. We make our appeal to yourselves, and ask:

***~~Whether what you have hitherto considered as liberty, has not been in reality the sorest bondage?~~***

Whether sin has not kept you from the love and service of God, and bound you as with adamantine chains to the objects of time and sense?

Whether in proportion as you were brought to the employment and felicity of the heavenly hosts, you would not attain to perfect freedom?

To all then we say, Believe in Christ, and give yourselves up to him, and you shall then "be delivered from the bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty of the children of God, [Romans 8:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.21)."

***~~2. The proper tendency of the gospel—~~***

Strange as the inconsistency is, the very persons who will exclaim against the Gospel as making the way to Heaven so strait that nobody can walk in it, will cry out against it also as a licentious doctrine, and will represent the preachers of it as saying that men may live as they please, provided only they believe.

But the Gospel is "a doctrine according to godliness;" and the very "grace of God which brings salvation, teaches men to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world." The Gospel, it is true, is "a law of liberty;" but not of liberty to live in sin: it is a liberty from sin; and a liberty in the ways of God. Instead of superseding morality, it raises the tone of morals to the highest possible pitch, requiring us to "walk in all things as Christ walked," and to "purify ourselves even as he is pure." And, while it sets up this high standard for our attainment, it sets up the same for our trial in the last day; and requires us so to speak and so to do, as they that shall be tried and judged by it. Know therefore, that notwithstanding the Gospel is as free for all as the light we see and the air we breathe, its proper tendency is to assimilate us to 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).

***~~3. The wisdom of all who profess to have embraced it—~~***

Doubtless it is your privilege to be rejoicing in God your Savior, and in the freeness and fullness of his salvation. But you must also keep in view the future judgment, and be acting continually with a reference to it. There is no dispensation given to you to continue in sin: "Shall you continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid." The scrutiny which you shall undergo in the last day, so far from being less exact than that of others, will be more strict, in proportion to the advantages you have enjoyed, and the professions you have made, [1 Peter 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.17). Your acceptance, it is true, will be solely on account of what the Lord Jesus Christ has done and suffered for you. But the truth of your faith will be tried by the works it has produced: and according to the measure and quality of them will be your reward.

I say then, in all that you say and do, have respect to the future judgment, when "God will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart" and in order to your being approved of God in that day, "walk in love, as Christ has loved you, [Ephesians 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.2);" and, while you endeavor to "walk in his steps" "let the same mind also be in you as was in Christ Jesus, [Philippians 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.5)."

***~~#2365~~***

***~~JUSTIFICATION BY WORKS EXPLAINED~~***

***~~[James 2:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.24)~~***

"You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone."

Certainly, of all the questions that can occupy the human mind, the first and greatest is, "How shall man be just before God [Job 9:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.2)." On this subject men have differed from each other as far as the east is from the west. To this difference the passage before us has not a little contributed. It is therefore most desirable that we enter candidly into the investigation of it, and endeavor to ascertain with all possible precision what is so indispensable to our eternal welfare.

It is obvious that the words which I have read to you are a deduction from a preceding argument. We ought therefore carefully to examine the argument itself; for, it is only by a thorough knowledge of the premises that we can understand the conclusion drawn from them.

Suppose that I were, as a conclusion of an argument, to say, 'So then man is an immortal being;' if the argument itself were not investigated, you might understand it as a denial of man's mortality: but, if the argument showed, that the conclusion referred to his soul alone, the conclusion would be found perfectly consistent with an apparently opposite position, namely, that man is a mortal being.

In like manner, if James' argument in the preceding context be candidly examined, there will be found no real inconsistency between the deduction contained in the text, and an apparently opposite deduction which may be founded on premises altogether different.

Let us consider then,

***~~I. The Apostle James' argument—~~***

The first thing to be inquired is:

***~~Whence the argument arose? Or, What was the occasion of the argument?~~***

James was reproving an evil which prevailed to a very great extent among the Church in his day; namely, the showing partiality to the richer members, while the poorer were treated with supercilious contempt, and harassed with the most flagrant acts of oppression, verse 2-6. Now, as this was directly contrary to the whole spirit of Christianity, he introduced his reproof with these words, "My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism! verse 1." Now these words, duly noticed, will give a clue to the whole. Do not hold the true faith in so erroneous and unworthy a manner. He then proceeds to show, that a faith productive of no better conduct than that, will never justify, "never save," the soul, verse 14; for that it is a dead faith, and not a living one, a mere carcass, and not a living body, verse 26.

***~~The next thing we have to do, is to trace the steps of his argument—~~***

Having reproved the partiality before-mentioned, he shows that it is alike contrary both to the law and to the Gospel: to the law, the very essence of which is love; (which if any person habitually violates, he violates the whole law, verse 8-11;) and to the Gospel, which inspires its votaries with a more liberal spirit, verse 12, and declares that the person who does not exercise mercy to his brethren, of whatever class they may be, shall find no mercy at the hands of God, verse 13.

He then appeals to the whole Church; and calls upon them to say whether any person so holding the Christian faith can be saved? and whether all the faith whereon he builds his confidence, is not a nullity, and a delusion? "What does it profit, my brethren, though a man says he has faith, and have not works? Can such a faith as that, save him, verse 14."

He then proceeds to show how vain any man's pretenses to love would be, if it were as inoperative as this faith. "Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is that? verses 15, 16." Could that person be said to possess any real love? or would such a love as that be approved and rewarded by God? Certainly not. "Even so then," says he, "faith, if it has not works, is dead, being alone, verse 17;" and any person before whom you might boast of such a faith as that, might justly reply, "Show me your faith without your works, (which you can never do) and I will show you my faith by my works, verse 18;" which is the only test to which such pretensions can be referred. Nay more: such a faith as that is no better than the faith of devils! "The devils believe that there is one God: and they tremble;" but they do not love. So you may believe that Jesus Christ is a Savior; and you may be partially affected by that persuasion: but, if you do not love, your faith is no better than devils: and, by pretending to a living and saving faith, when you have nothing but a dead and inoperative faith, you only show, that you are a "vain," ignorant, and self-deluded "man, verse 19, 20."

He now goes on to confirm these assertions by an appeal to the Scriptures themselves. "Was not *Abraham*our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? See how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect, verse 21, 22." Abraham believed in the promised Seed, "in whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed." But what kind of a faith was his? Was it unproductive of holy obedience? No! it led him to obey the hardest command that was ever given to mortal man, even to slay, and to reduce to ashes upon the altar, that very son to whom the promises were made, and through whom alone they could ever be accomplished: so that his works evidenced the truth and sincerity of his faith; and proved indisputably, that he was accepted of his God. His faith existed before: but now it operated; and "was made perfect by the works which it produced;" just as a tree is then only in a state of complete perfection, when it is laden with its proper fruits. The fruit indeed does not add to the vegetative power that produced it; but it evidences that power, and displays it in full perfection: and so did Abraham's works evince the truth of the faith which previously existed in him, and complete the objects for which it had been bestowed.

"And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend, verse 23." The same he illustrates by another instance from Scripture, even that of Rahab, who evinced the truth of her faith, and was accepted in the exercise of it, when at the peril of her life she concealed the Jewish spies, and sent them home in safety to their own camp, verse 25.

Now from all this he draws, as an unquestionable deduction, that very truth which in the first instance he had only asserted; namely, that persons, whatever degrees of faith they might pretend to, could never be accepted by God, unless their faith wrought by love: "You see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only," for as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also, verse 24, 26. If, verse 25 were put into a parenthesis, the connection between, verse 24 and, verse 26 would more plainly appear, and the argument stand more full and complete: "You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone. . . As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead." [James 2:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.24),[26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.26)

Thus viewed, the argument is clear from beginning to end. That the terms which are used are strong, is certain: but then they may be accounted for from the general drift of the argument, and its immense importance to the Church of God. *The Apostles do not measure words and syllables as we are apt to do, but speak in broad unqualified terms*. Paul had done so on the subject of a sinner's acceptance by faith alone; and James does so on the subject of those vain pretenses to faith which were made by many who were destitute of good works. But an attention to the scope of their respective arguments will lead us to a just view, both of the terms which they use, and of the conclusions at which they arrive. James's argument we have seen. Let us now attend to,

***~~II. The conclusion drawn from it—~~***

This must accord with the argument on which it is founded. If we make the premises refer to one thing, and the conclusion to another, or, if we make the conclusion broader than the premises, we destroy the argument altogether, and make the Apostle reason, not only as if he were not inspired, but as if he were not endowed with common sense. What then does his conclusion amount to? It amounts to this:

***~~1. That the future judgment will proceed on grounds of perfect equity—~~***

God could, if it pleased him, assign to every man his portion in the eternal world, according to what he has seen existing in the heart. But it is his intention to show before the whole universe, that, as the governor and the judge of all, he dispenses rewards and punishments on grounds which are not arbitrary, but strictly equitable. On this account the day of judgment is called "the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God, [Romans 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.5)." If the judgment were passed on men solely on grounds which none but God could see, it would be impossible for any one to judge of the equity of his proceedings: but when the works of all are brought forth as witnesses of the inward dispositions and habits of their minds, all can see the correctness of the estimate which is formed of men's characters, and the justice of the sentence that is passed upon them.

This then is one part of the conclusion which the Apostle arrives at in the words before us: *God will not judge of men by their faith, which he alone can discern, but by their works, which all may judge*of as soon as ever they are laid before them. A man may pretend to faith of the strongest kind: but the inquiry will be, what effects did it produce? And, if the fruits which it produced were such as were insufficient to attest its genuine truth and excellence, they will be utterly disregarded; and God will say, "Depart from me, I never knew you, you workers of iniquity! [Matthew 7:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.21-23)." However confidently the truth and genuineness of it may be asserted by the persons themselves, God will not at all regard it, but will bring everything to the test which is here established, and condemn or justify every man according to his works, [Matthew 12:36-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.36-37).

***~~2. That faith, of whatever kind it be, is of no value, any farther than it is attested by works—~~***

If faith in the first instance apprehends Christ as a Savior from guilt and condemnation, it does not rest there: it lays hold on him for sanctification, as well as for righteousness, [1 Corinthians 1:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.30); and would account him not worthy of the name of Jesus, if he did not save his people from their sins, [Matthew 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 1.21). The characters given to faith in the inspired volume are inseparable from it:  
faith *works by love*[Galatians 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.6),  
faith *overcomes the world*[1 John 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.4),  
and faith *purifies the heart*[Acts 15:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 15.9).

If it does not produce these effects, it will never benefit the soul. Knowing therefore in what way God will apprise it hereafter, it befits us to form a correct estimate of it now; and to weigh ourselves in the balance of the sanctuary now, that we may not be found lacking in the day of judgment.

It will here be expected, of course, that we answer a common objection to the foregoing statement:

It is said that Paul's opinions and declarations on this subject are directly opposed to those of James; since, after a long argument, he comes to this conclusion: "Therefore we conclude, that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law, [Romans 3:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.28)." He goes farther still, and says, that "to him who works not, but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness, [Romans 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.5)." Now it may well be asked, 'How can this be reconciled with the foregoing statement?' I answer, 'Only examine Paul's argument, as you have that of James, and you will see that there is no opposition at all between their respective assertions.'*The two Apostles are writing on two different subjects*.

Paul is proving that a man is not to seek salvation by any righteousness of his own, but simply by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Whereas James is proving, that the man who professes to have faith in Christ, must show forth his faith by his works.

Paul endeavors to convince the Legalist.

James endeavors to convince the Antinomian.

Paul shows that works are nothing without faith.

James shows that faith is nothing without works.

Paul exalts Christ, as giving a title to Heaven.

James exalts Christ, as giving a fitness for Heaven.

Paul bends the whole force of his mind to establish the leading doctrine of the Gospel, justification by faith.

James strives to have the doctrine of justification by faith adorned.

Thus, according to the two Apostles, a man is justified by faith, because by it he is *made*righteous; and he is justified by works, because by them he is *proved*righteous. God in justifying him, whether on the one ground, or the other, approves himself both "a just God and a Savior."

We may render this matter somewhat more clear by means of a familiar illustration. A scion must be engrafted into a stock in order that it may live: and it must bring forth fruit in order to prove that it does live. Is there any opposition between these two assertions? None whatever.

So then with Paul I assert that man must be engrafted into Christ by faith, in order that he may live: and with James I assert that he must bring forth fruits of righteousness, to prove that he does live. Without being engrafted into the stock, he can have no life: and, if he brings not forth good works, he shows that he has no life. These two positions are perfectly compatible with each other: and so, when properly understood, are the apparently opposite positions of these two Apostles.

Hoping now that I have set the whole of this matter in a clear light, **I conclude with a few words**,

***~~1. Of caution—~~***

Two things in particular I would caution you against:

First, Do not *separate*faith and works.

Next, Do not *confound*faith and works.

Do not separatethem, or imagine that you can be saved by either of them apart from the other: for faith, if it is alone, is dead; and works, if they are alone, leave you altogether destitute of any saving interest in Christ.

If your faith is strong enough to remove mountains, yet, if it works not by love—it will leave you no better than "sounding brass, or tinkling cymbals."

And if your works be ever so perfect, they can never exceed what the law requires of you; and consequently, can never discharge the debt which you owe to God for your past violations of it: nor indeed can you ever in your present imperfect state fulfill the law so perfectly as not to come short of it every day you live. Consequently, every day you live, you stand in need of mercy for your daily transgressions, instead of purchasing Heaven by your superabounding merits.

On the other hand, Do not confound the two, as though you were to be saved by faith and works united; or to have a first justification by faith, and a second justification by works. Either the one or the other of these errors will invalidate the whole Gospel; and will rob Christ of his glory, and you of your salvation.

Christ is the only Savior of sinful man: and his righteousness is that in which alone any man can be accepted before God. If you join anything with that, you make it void: and, as far as respects you, "Christ will have died in vain, [Galatians 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.2); [Galatians 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.4)."

The true way of salvation is this: go to Christ as a sinner, and seek salvation altogether through his sin-atoning sacrifice, and his obedience unto death. But, when you have believed in him, be careful to "maintain good works," yes, and to "excel in" good works, [Titus 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 3.8).

Then Christ will be honored in every way—your *faith*will honor him as the alone Savior of mankind; and your *works*will honor him as your Lord and Master. But remember to keep each in its place. In building an edifice, you do not build the superstructure first, (if I may so speak,) and then lay the foundation afterwards. Nor do you mingle the foundation and superstructure in one indiscriminate mass: but you keep each in its place; and then it answers the end for which it was raised. Just so, you must lay Christ as your foundation first; and afterwards raise on him the superstructure of good works: then shall you be found "workmen who need not be ashamed;" and both in your faith and in your works be justified before God.

***~~2. Of encouragement—~~***

Let not any apparent difficulties in this subject embarrass you. They will all vanish in an instant, if only you get a broken and contrite heart. It is surprising what light such a state of mind will reflect on the subject before us. It may not indeed enable you to solve all the verbal difficulties that may be raised: but, as far as relates to the main subject, it will scatter all doubts, as mist is scattered by the noon-day sun.

It will convince you that no righteousness but that of Christ can ever avail for your acceptance before God: and, at the same time, that holiness is no less necessary for your final enjoyment of his favor.

It will convince you too, that both faith and holiness, being the gifts of God, you have no reason to despair of attaining all that is necessary to your complete salvation; since God is pledged "not to despise the contrite heart," or to withhold from his upright people the blessings either of grace or glory, [Psalm 84:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 84.11).

***~~#2366~~***

***~~THE BEST OF MEN, BUT WEAK AND FRAIL~~***

**[James 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.2)**

"We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check."

That persons instructed in divine truth should be anxious to instruct others is well: but to rush uncalled into the ostensible office of the ministry, is by no means expedient. *By his life, as well as by his doctrine, must a minister instruct his people*: and if, on the one hand, his reward will be glorious if he discharges his duties aright; his punishment will, on the other hand, be proportionably severe, if by word or deed he "casts a stumbling-block before others," and "cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of."

Before a man therefore engages in this arduous calling, he should see his way clear: lest, by entering rashly upon it, he involve himself in the heavier condemnation. This is the hint given by James, in the verse before my text: and, to enforce it, he reminds us of our extreme frailty; since "in many things we all offend," and have therefore abundant reason for caution in contracting, without necessity, such an augmented responsibility.

Let me, then, show you,

***~~I. What even good men have to mourn over, in their daily walk before God—~~***

"There is no man who lives, and sins not." By reason of our extreme weakness, and the numberless obstacles which lie in our way, there is not any man who does not occasionally trip, and offend:

***~~1. By a slip of his feet—~~***

No good man will, knowingly and deliberately, do that which is evil. "A man truly born of God cannot so commit sin." He has a principle within him which will not allow it. But, sometimes through ignorance and inadvertence, and sometimes through weakness and corruption, the very best of men may err: as it is said, "The righteous falls seven times."

When James and John proposed to call fire from Heaven, to consume a Samaritan village, it was doubtless from a mistaken idea, that the example of Elijah, who so vindicated the honor of Jehovah, was applicable to the occasion which then presented itself to them; and that such was a proper way of expressing their indignation against those who had refused to their Master the rights of hospitality.

It was also from a mistaken love to his Divine Master that Peter dissuaded Jesus from subjecting himself to the sufferings which he had just predicted.

But the principle, in both these instances, was really evil, though the Apostles themselves thought it to be good: and therefore they brought on themselves a just rebuke. In Peter's requiring the Gentiles to submit to the Jewish law, there was downright deception, such as betrayed Barnabas also into the very same fault. Here was weakness, here was the sad effect of human corruption: and, accordingly it was reproved with a severity proportioned to the offense.

In Paul and Barnabas too, there was a blameworthy contention, issuing in their final separation. The error of Peter and Barnabas proceeded from an undue compliance; and that of Paul and Barnabas from an undue pertinacity, both in sentiment and determination. But, as such things have been in the Church, even among the Apostles themselves; so must they be expected to arise, while human nature is so weak, and so many difficulties beset our way.

***~~2. By a slip of his tongue—~~***

"If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check." The fact is, that *every corruption of the heart finds its first and readiest gratification through the tongue.*

If *pride*or *vanity*inflates the mind, it will reveal itself, not only in the look and gesture, but through some language of the lips.

If *levity*has put a man off his guard, it will reveal itself by some unadvised expressions, some "jestings" (facetious terms of double import), which may excite a smile at the moment, but are quite offensive to God.

Need I say how *anger*will vent itself, or how *uncharitableness*will indulge its malignant propensities? But so it is with every unhallowed feeling of the soul: and he is the most perfect man who puts the most complete restraint upon his tongue, and does not allow it not to utter anything which God will not approve.

While good men have so much occasion to mourn, let us consider,

***~~II. What they have more especially to attend to, in order to counteract the evil of their hearts—~~***

Among the many things which might be mentioned, I will recommend,

***~~1. Humiliation—~~***

Who has not found, by sad experience, the truth of James' assertion, that "in many things we all offend?" Who then has not reason to lie low both before God and man? If Paul complained of "the law in his members warring against the law of his mind," much more may we; and with him cry out, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me?" Methinks, if Job abhorred himself, and the Prophet Isaiah complained, "Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips, and dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips!"—a leper in the midst of a leprous population; then no humiliation can be too deep for us. Let us walk softly then, every one of us, in the remembrance of our manifold infirmities; and abase ourselves before God, as "less than the least of all saints," yes, "as the very chief of sinners."

***~~2. Watchfulness—~~***

Never can we tell what an hour may bring forth; or what temptations may arise, to cause us to offend either in word or deed. We should therefore "make a covenant with our eyes," as holy Job did; and "set a watch before the door of our lips," as did the man after God's own heart.

We should mark the first risings of sinful inclination, that they may not operate with undue force, and betray us into actual sin.

We should mark with jealous care the motives and principles by which we are actuated; remembering, that by them will the quality of our actions be determined, and that by them we shall be judged in the last day. In a word, we must "keep our hearts with all diligence, knowing that out of them come the issues of life."

***~~3. Dependence upon God—~~***

Here is our only security. If we trust in our own hearts, then our folly will very soon appear. Satan can "assume the form of an angel of light," and deceive us by specious appearances. And if we would be preserved from his wiles, our prayer would continually be to God, "Hold up my goings in your paths, that my footsteps slip not!" "Hold me up, and I shall be safe!" Then, notwithstanding our weakness and frailty, we may hope to be "preserved blameless until the day of Christ."

"Now unto him who is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, forever and ever! Amen."

***~~#2367~~***

***~~THE EVILS OF THE TONGUE~~***

***~~[James 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.6)~~***

"The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by Hell."

Among the most important of all subjects must be reckoned the government of the tongue. The consideration of it is well calculated to convince the profane, to pluck off the mask from hypocrites, to humble the sincere, and to edify every description of persons. James, who intended his epistle as a corrective to the abuses that prevailed in the Christian Church, insisted strongly upon this subject: and, in the words before us, has given us such a description of the tongue, as, if it had proceeded from any other than an inspired writer, would have been deemed a libel upon human nature. In order that the text may be fully understood, we shall show,

***~~I. The true character of the human tongue—~~***

***~~The Apostle tells us "it is a fire"—~~***

Fire, in its original formation, was intended for the good of man; and, when subordinated to his wishes, is highly beneficial: but its tendency is to consume and to destroy. Thus the tongue was at first made for the Creator's praise; but through the introduction of sin, that member, which was, and, if well used—yet is, the glory of man, [Psalm 57:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 57.8), has become "an instrument of unrighteousness" and all iniquity.

Fire also, even the smallest spark, is capable of producing incalculable mischief; such mischief as it may not be in the power of man to repair. Thus also will one single motion of the tongue, verse 3, 4. *It may so irritate and inflame a man, as to change him instantly into a savage beast, or an incarnate devil: and, if the whole world would labor to remedy the evil, it would mock their endeavors.*

***~~He further adds that it is "a world of iniquity"—~~***

There is not any sin whatever, which does not stand in the nearest connection with the tongue, and employ it in its service. Search the long catalogue of sins against God; then inspect those against our neighbor; and, lastly, those against ourselves; and there will not be found one, no, not one, who has not the tongue as its principal ally. See [Romans 3:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.13-14). All iniquities whatever center in it, and are fulfilled by it: so justly is it called, "A world of iniquity."

Its character will yet further appear by considering,

***~~II. Its effects—~~***

***~~1. These are defiling—~~***

*Sin, as soon as ever it is conceived in the heart, defiles the soul: but when it is uttered by the lips, "it defiles the whole body."* Utterance gives solidity and permanency to that which before existed only in idea, and might have passed away: and, inasmuch as the tongue has every other member at its command to execute, according to their several powers, the things it has divulged, the whole man is become a partaker of its guilt and defilement, [Ecclesiastes 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 5.6). [Mark 7:20-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 7.20-23). And, though all its communications are not equally polluting—yet is there a stain left by means of them, a stain which nothing but the Redeemer's blood can ever wash away!

***~~2. Destructive—~~***

To such an astonishing degree has this fire gained the ascendant, that it has "inflamed the whole course of nature." Look at *individuals*; what malignant passions has it kindled in them! Visit *families*; what animosities, and inextinguishable feuds has it produced! Survey churches; and you will find the unhallowed fire burning even in the sanctuary of God. By means of heretics, cavilers, and proud disputers, and others who cause divisions and dissensions; and sometimes too, even in the very censers of his ministers; alluding to [Leviticus 10:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 10.1). Cast your eyes round upon whole *nations*; and you will perceive that, times without number, it has kindled the flames of war, and spread desolation through the globe! What has not been perpetrated during the French Revolution under the influence of those two words, liberty and equality!

To prove that this account is not exaggerated, we shall point out,

***~~III. The reason of its producing these effects—~~***

***~~The tongue "itself is set on fire by Hell"—~~***

Satan is the source and author of all the evils that proceed from the tongue.

Does it falsify? Behold it does so at the instigation of that wicked fiend, "the father of lies, [Acts 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.3). [John 8:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.44)."

Does it discourage men from the prosecution of their duty? It does so as the devil's agent, [Matthew 16:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.23).

Does it accuse and scandalize the people of God? Who but Satan is the author of such calumnies, [Revelation 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 12.10).

Does it disseminate error? The propagator of that error is Satan's minister, however he is transformed into an angel of light [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).

Does it encourage any evil design? It is the devil himself who speaks by it [1 Kings 22:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 22.21-22).

In every sin that it commits, it is actuated by "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)." Its whole "wisdom is earthly, sensual, devilish, verse 15."*It comes from Hell, and leads to Hell!* And, if God were to withdraw his restraints here, as he does in Hell, it would speedily produce a very Hell upon earth.

***~~This alone can account for the effects that proceed from it—~~***

Doubtless the wickedness of the heart may account for much: but, if the flames were not fanned by satanic agency, we can scarcely conceive that they would rage with such an irresistible force, and to such a boundless extent.

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How great must be the evil of the human heart!~~***

The heart is the fountain, in which "the evil treasure is, [Matthew 12:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.35);" the tongue is only the channel in which it flows. If the *channel*then is so vile, what must the *fountain*be? Yet every one of us has this tongue in his mouth, and this heart in his bosom: and, if God would leave us without restraint, there is not one of us but would proclaim all the evil of his heart, as much as the most loathsome sensualist, or most daring blasphemer.

***~~2. How much do we need the influences of the Holy Spirit!~~***

It is absolutely impossible for man to tame this unruly member, verse 7, 8. Yet restrained it must be, if ever we would be saved, [James 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.26). What then shall we do? Shall we sit down in despair? God forbid. The Holy Spirit will help our infirmities, [Romans 8:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.26), and Christ will give us more grace if we call upon him. Let us then look to Christ; and we shall prove by sweet experience, that his "grace is sufficient for us, 2 Corinthians 12:9," and that through him, strengthening us, we can do all things, [Philippians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.13)."

***~~3. How careful should we be of every word we utter!~~***

Immense injury may we do by one unguarded word. We may take away a character which we can never restore, or inflict a wound which we can never heal. On this account we should "set a watch before the door of our lips, [Psalm 141:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 141.3)." Nor is this a matter of expediency merely, but of necessity; for God has warned us that we shall give account of every idle word, and that by our words we shall be justified, and by our words we shall be condemned, [Matthew 12:36-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.36-37); [Matthew 5:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.22). Let us then be utterly purposed that our mouth shall not offend, [Psalm 17:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 17.3). Let our tongue be as choice silver, or a tree of life, to enrich and comfort the Lord's people, [Proverbs 10:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 10.20); [Proverbs 15:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 15.4). Let our "speech be always with grace seasoned with salt," for the honor of God, and the good of our fellow-creatures, [Colossians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 4.6). [Ephesians 4:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.29). [Ephesians 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.4).

***~~#2368~~***

***~~INFLUENCE OF DIVINE WISDOM UPON THE CONDUCT~~***

***~~[James 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.13)~~***

"Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom."

*The government of the tongue is of all things the most difficult; because every evil that is in the heart seeks for vent through that organ.* A man who would be able so to control it that no unadvised word would ever escape from his lips, would be a perfect man. Yet, if a man profess to be religious, and have not so much self-government as to impose a habitual restraint upon his tongue, he deceives his own soul, and his religion is vain, [James 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.26). The gift of speech is to be improved for God by holy and heavenly communications, and the man who allows it to be a vehicle of sin, discovers himself to be a hypocrite before God. The inconsistency of such conduct is obvious. "A fountain cannot send forth both fresh water and bitter; nor can a tree bear both olives and figs:" so neither can a renewed heart bear such different and discordant fruits, verse 9-12. Whoever therefore professes godliness, should take care that no such inconsistency be found in him. "Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom."

In these words we see,

***~~I. The proper character of Christians—~~***

When we say that the Christian is "wise and understanding," we seem to be guilty of great arrogance; since it is a notorious fact, that the great majority of religious persons, as Paul himself acknowledges, are of the lower orders of society, whose talents and attainments are extremely limited, [1 Corinthians 1:26-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.26-28). And even where the disadvantages of education are not so great, it is often found that "the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." How then can we presume to designate the godly by such inappropriate and high-sounding names? I answer, That the wisdom of this world is in God's estimation, folly; and that his people alone deserve the titles that are here assigned to them.

***~~1. Christians wise and understanding, as fearing God—~~***

They all without exception fear God. This is the lowest attainment that will justify any pretensions to true piety. And what is said of it by holy Job? "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding, [Job 28:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 28.28)." Here then at once is their character fixed by the testimony of God himself. And to them does it belong exclusively: for of all others the Prophet Jeremiah says, "They have rejected the word of the Lord; and what wisdom is in them? [Jeremiah 8:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 8.9)." They may possess much which passes under that name: they may be skilled in arts and sciences, even as Solomon himself: yet they show that they are fools as it respects the things of God.

They show that they know not the true end of their being,  
they know not wherein real happiness consists,  
they know not the value of an immortal soul,  
they know not the judgment that awaits them, or the importance of preparing for it.

Their views are circumscribed by the things of time and sense; and of Heaven and heavenly things they have no knowledge. "Their wisdom and knowledge, such as it is, only perverts them, [Isaiah 47:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 47.10)." Hence of them it is said, that "madness is in their hearts while they live [Ecclesiastes 9:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 9.3)."

But of the Lord's people, however ignorant they may be of other matters, it may be said, as on this very ground it was said of the Jews of old, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people, [Deuteronomy 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 4.6)."

***~~2. Christians wise and understanding, as instructed by God himself—~~***

This also is peculiar to them, and abundantly vindicates their title to the character given them in the text. To them universally, and to them exclusively, does that promise belong, "They shall all be taught of God [John 6:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.45)." They are taught of God, who by his Spirit has "opened the eyes of their understanding [Ephesians 1:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.17-18)," and "brought them out of darkness into the marvelous light of his Gospel, [1 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.9)." To them he has given a spiritual discernment, whereby they are enabled to discern the things of the Spirit, [1 Corinthians 2:9-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.9-12). He has given to them such views of Christ as "flesh and blood could never have revealed to them, [Matthew 16:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.16-17)." "Wonderful things are they enabled to behold in God's law, [Psalm 119:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.18)." They see, what others have no conception of—the spirituality of that law, extending to every thought and desire of the heart. They see in that looking-glass:  
the unsearchable wickedness of their own hearts, [1 Kings 8:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 8.38);  
their just desert of God's wrath and indignation;  
their utter need of a Savior;  
the suitableness of Christ to their extreme necessities;  
and his sufficiency for all their wants.

"They have an understanding given them to know him who is true; and, in consequence of that, they are in him who is true, even in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the true God and eternal life, [1 John 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.20)." To them are made known things which from all eternity were hidden in God; and things which the natural man, whatever be his endowments, cannot receive or know, [1 Corinthians 2:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.7-8); [1 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.14). Yes, though they be in every other respect mere "babes, to them God has revealed what he has hidden from the wise and prudent, [Matthew 11:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.25)." So that, while the man of learning, that is wise in his own conceit, looks down upon them with contempt as weak and foolish, they see the vanity of all his boasted wisdom, and they pity the blindness of his deluded mind.

See how strongly all this is asserted by the Apostle Paul: "He who is spiritual (however destitute he may be of human learning) judges all things: yet he himself is judged of no man: (he estimates rightly the state of others, while they can form no just estimate of his,) for who (what carnal man) has known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we (we who are taught of God) have the mind of Christ;" and consequently can form a correct judgment both of our own state and theirs, [1 Corinthians 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.15-16). Thus, while all others are "perishing for lack of knowledge, [Hosea 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 4.6)," they have "that unction of the Holy One whereby they know 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 have become truly wise, being made "wise unto salvation through faith in Christ, [2 Timothy 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.15)."

Such being their high character, they are concerned to know, and to consider well,

***~~II. The conduct that befits believers—~~***

Doubtless their deportment should be such as is suited to the distinguished rank which they bear among their fellows: and their superiority to others should be marked;

***~~1. In their works—~~***

Their whole "conduct would be such as becomes the Gospel of Christ, [Philippians 1:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.27)." A tree must be known by its fruits; and their faith be judged of by their works, [James 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.18). The whole tenor of these must be good: and, though they are not to be done with a view to man's applause, they must be such as to evince to all around them the excellence of the principles which they profess: "they must make their light so to shine before men, that all who behold their good works may glorify their Father in Heaven, [Matthew 5:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.16)." They must "show out of a good conduct their works."

But in relation to these (their works) the godly will find no difficulty, if they attend to that which is principally adverted to in our text, namely, to walk worthy of their profession.

***~~2. In their spirit—~~***

The Christian is renewed, not in knowledge or in the outward conduct only, but "in the spirit of his mind, [Ephesians 4:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.23)." He is poured into a new mold, the mold of the Gospel, [Romans 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.17). He is assimilated to the Lord Jesus Christ himself, especially in the meekness and gentleness of his spirit under the heaviest trials, and the bitterest provocations. Of him we are told, that "he was led as a lamb to the slaughter; and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth, [Isaiah 53:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.7);" and in that particular he is more especially commended to us as an example: for "he suffered, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps; who did no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth; who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, threatened not; but committed himself to him who judges righteously, [1 Peter 2:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.21-23)."

This is the state which God approves. The outward act is comparatively of little value in his sight; since that may abound even where the inward principle is most corrupt: but when he sees "the hidden man of the heart" thus habited, he views it with delight: "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit is in his sight of great price, [1 Peter 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.4)."

This is what the Apostle so beautifully inculcates in our text: "Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom." Humility and wisdom are intimately and indissolubly connected: as it is said, "He who is hasty of spirit, exalts folly; whereas he who is slow to wrath, is of great understanding, [Proverbs 14:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 14.29)." In this then must every true Christian excel: and it will be in vain for him to pretend that he has been taught of God, if he has not learned, and practically too, this important lesson.

Do you ask how the true Christian must be distinguished? Paul shall tell you: "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you, [Colossians 3:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.12-13)." This is the proper test of your principles. If you have knowledge, it is well. If you have faith, it is well. If you have works, it is well. But you may "have the knowledge of men and angels, and a faith that can remove mountains; and such zeal, both of an active and passive kind, as may lead you to give all your goods to feed the poor, and your bodies to be burned, and yet, after all, lack that internal principle of love, which is necessary to your acceptance with God [1 Corinthians 13:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.1-3)." Your proper character is, that you are "the meek of the earth: seek righteousness therefore, and seek meekness, [Zephaniah 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zeph 2.3)." "I beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, [2 Corinthians 10:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 10.1)." that you cultivate this spirit to the uttermost: for, if you have not in this respect "the mind that was in Christ Jesus, [Philippians 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.5)," you are not, you cannot be his, [1 John 3:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.24); [1 John 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.17).

***~~For the more extensive improvement of this subject, I would add two solemn admonitions;~~***

***~~1. Rest not in attainments, while destitute of saving knowledge—~~***

There is a great diversity in the natural dispositions of men: some are from their very birth more meek and gentle than others: and certainly they whom nature has formed in this better mold, have much to be thankful for. But *let not anyone mistake this natural gentleness for grace*. The humility of which my text speaks, is "a fruit of the Spirit, [Galatians 5:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.22-23)," and is always associated with true wisdom.

It springs from a sense of our own unworthiness, and of the obligations which we owe to Christ for all the wonders of redeeming love.

***~~It is a humble submission to Almighty God, whose hand is viewed in all events, and whose love is tasted in the bitterest dispensations.~~***

It is a resignation of the soul to him, that he may perfect it in his own way, and glorify himself upon it, as seems him good.

Before you draw inferences then from your comparative proficiency in gentle habits, inquire how they have been obtained? Examine whether they are associated with this heavenly wisdom; and whether they are the result of deep humiliation, and of ardent love to God. If you have not been taught of God to know yourselves and the Lord Jesus Christ, you are in darkness even until now: and though you appear to be in the fold of Christ, you have never entered it at the strait gate, and therefore are not regarded by him as his sheep indeed. O! may God instruct you, and by his Holy Spirit guide you into all truth!

***~~2. Rest not in knowledge, while destitute of these attainments—~~***

Many possess a very clear knowledge of Scripture truths, while yet they do not experience their sanctifying and transforming efficacy. *It is a melancholy fact, that many who profess religion are grievously under the dominion of evil tempers*. It was evidently so among those to whom James addressed this epistle. But, beloved, "these things ought not so to be," and must not so be: for, if they be, they will terminate in fearful disappointment at the day of judgment.

Do not think to excuse yourselves by saying that your temper is naturally hasty and violent. It may be so: but this is no reason why it is to have the mastery over you. If the struggles which you have to maintain be the greater, the strength of Christ shall be the more displayed in the victories which he will enable you to gain. Only go to him in fervent and continual prayer, and you shall find, that "his grace is sufficient for you," it never failed yet; nor shall it ever fail, when sought in sincerity and truth. Only prostrate yourselves before him with shame, and sorrow, and contrition, and implore of him the assistance of his Spirit; and then will he "beautify you with salvation, [Psalm 149:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 149.4);" for "instead of the thorn shall grow up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier shall grow up the myrtle-tree: and you shall be to the Lord for a name, and for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off [Isaiah 55:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.13)."

***~~#2369~~***

***~~THE NATURE OF TRUE RELIGION~~***

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

"But the wisdom that comes from Heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere."

Religion, like a tree, must be judged of by its fruits. *That which savors of pride, earthliness, or sensuality, is not of God.*The character of true religion is justly drawn in the words before us.

***~~I. True religion is holy in its nature—~~***

***~~True religion, above all other things, is entitled to the name of "wisdom"—~~***

Saving religion always:  
enlightens the mind,  
informs the judgment,  
and regulates the life.

He who lives under its influence, is wise in the estimation of God himself.

***~~Being from above, true religion resembles its Divine Author—~~***

Religion is a beam issuing from God the fountain of light; and, as "in him is no darkness at all," so neither is there anything impure in that which flows from him. It may be mixed with sin, but in its own nature it is "pure;" and, in proportion as it prevails, it will dissipate the clouds of ignorance and sin. All "spiritual or fleshly filthiness" will surely vanish before it, [Matthew 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.8). [Acts 15:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 15.9). 2 Corinthians 7:1.

In consequence of this,

***~~II. True religion is useful in its tendency—~~***

***~~1. True religion is amiable in spirit—~~***

Though men differ widely in their natural tempers—yet the unregenerate are, on many occasions, quarrelsome, fierce, implacable. But as soon as ever true religion exerts its influence on our minds, we mortify these unhallowed tempers, and become "peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated." From thenceforth it is the delight of our souls to cultivate and promote peace, to maintain in ourselves a meek and quiet spirit, and to exercise, as occasion may require, forbearance and forgiveness to all around us.

***~~2. True religion is benevolent in conduct—~~***

Compassion and diligence are inseparable attributes of true religion. The real Christian is not, like the barren fig-tree, covered with the leaves of an outward profession, but destitute of fruit. He labors to abound in every good word and work, and to benefit to the utmost the bodies and souls of his fellow-creatures. His heart is "full" of love, and out of the abundance of his heart he both speaks and acts.

It is within us a living principle,

***~~III. True religion is uniform in its operations—~~***

***~~1. True religion extends to duties without limitation—~~***

The grace of God will not admit of "partiality" in our obedience. It will stimulate us to difficult and self-denying duties, as well as to those which are more easy and pleasant; and will make us as solicitous to do what is right towards strangers or enemies, as towards our own friends, [1 Timothy 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 5.21).

***~~2. True religion extends to desires without reserve—~~***

True religion penetrates to the inmost soul, and regulates all our motives and principles of action. The person whose outward conduct only is good, is in God's sight no other than a "whited sepulcher." The man whose heart is right with God, will watch against all selfish ends, and endeavor to act with a single eye to the glory of his God.

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How unjustly is true religion condemned in the world!~~***

Many consider religion as destructive of all personal and social happiness; but what is there in this representation of religion that deserves such a character? Let the world call it folly if they will; but God accounts it "wisdom."

***~~2. What reason have the most godly to blush and be ashamed!~~***

We must not estimate our religion by our opinion, so much as by our practice. Doubtless we must build on Christ as our only foundation; but we have no evidence of a union with him any further than we raise upon him this holy superstructure. Alas! what poor builders have the very best of us been; and how little progress have we made when we judge by this test!

***~~3. What need have we to wait continually upon God in prayer!~~***

This wisdom is "from above," and can be derived from God alone; and how can we obtain it from him, but in the exercise of prayer? Let us then ask it of him, who has promised to impart it "liberally, and without upbraiding, [James 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.5)."

***~~#2370~~***

***~~FRIENDSHIP OF THE WORLD IS ENMITY WITH GOD~~***

***~~[James 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.4)~~***

"You adulterers and adulteresses, don't you know that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God!"

There is a boldness of speech, which not only comports well with the character of God's ambassadors, but is necessary to the faithful discharge of the ministerial office. To those who are unused to the figurative language of Scripture, the address of James to the mere professors of Christianity may appear coarse and severe. But the truth he delivered, needed to be strongly insisted on even in the apostolic age; so much did the practice of the Church fall short of the knowledge which was at that time generally diffused. As to the appellation which he gave the worldly professing Christians, it could not fail of being understood in its proper sense; because all knew that God called himself the husband of the Church; and consequently, that the violation of the people's engagements to him justly entitled them to the name by which they were addressed.

To the professing Christians of this age, the doctrine of the text should be very fully opened. It is indeed far from being calculated to please men: but we proceed to the consideration of it, in the hope that the word shall not go forth in vain.

We shall endeavor to show,

***~~I. What we are to understand by friendship of the world—~~***

The "world" must be understood in its largest sense, as comprehending not only the *people*, but also the *pleasures*, *riches*, and *honors*of the world, [1 John 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.15-16). To draw the precise limits of that which is here called "the friendship" of the world, is not so easy. Nevertheless we may ascertain this with as much accuracy as is necessary on the present occasion.

If we love any one person above all others, and strive to please him habitually, not only in common with others, but even in direct opposition to them, we certainly must be acknowledged to have a considerable degree of friendship for him. Let us inquire then:

1. Which do we love more: the world, or God?

2. Which do we strive to please when their commands are irreconcilable with each other: the world, or God?

If conscience testifies that the world has in these respects a decided preference, we are, beyond all doubt, the friends of the world.

***~~II. In what respects friendship with the world is enmity with God—~~***

This may seem a strong expression; but it does not exceed the truth. For the friendship of the world is, in fact, a denial of God's excellency, since it declares that the world is a better portion than he.

Friendship with the world is a contempt of his authority, seeing that when he says, "My son, give me your heart," it makes us reply with Pharaoh, "Who is the Lord, that I should serve him? I know not the Lord, neither will I obey his voice".

Friendship with the world is also a violation of our most solemn engagements with him. He is our Husband; and we bound ourselves to him in baptism to "renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil," and to be his, even his only. But by receiving the world to our bosom, we allow that to invade his property, and, as the text intimates, are guilty of spiritual adultery.

Moreover it is (as far as our influence extends) a banishing of the very remembrance of him from the earth. God himself testifies respecting the friends of the world, that "he is not in all their thoughts:" and it is certain that, while they can converse readily on every worldly subject, they like not to hear or speak of his name: and if there were not a few who stand forth as his witnesses upon earth, his very name would soon be blotted out of our remembrance.

If the friends of the world would view their conduct in this light, they would see an extreme malignity in the practices which they now maintain and justify: and they would tremble at the thought of being found enemies to him:  
who, as omniscient, sees;  
who, as holy, hates;  
who, as just, condemns; and  
who, as almighty, will punish, such daring impiety!

***~~III. The state of those who cultivate friendship of the world—~~***

Nothing can be more express than the declaration of the text: they are "enemies of God!" Whether they intend it or not, whether they think of it or not—they are enemies of God. However sober, modest, kind, generous, and amiable they may be in their deportment, they still are enemies of God. Exalt their characters ever so highly, so that they shall appear in the most enviable light—you must bring them down at last with this melancholy exception, but "they are enemies of God! [2 Kings 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 5.1)."

Nor is this a matter that admits of doubt. James even appealed to the very persons whom he was condemning, and made them judges in their own cause:

"Don't you know this?"

Can you doubt of it one moment?

Does not the Scripture fully declare it?

Does not experience universally attest it?

But there is an emphasis in the text that marks this truth in the strongest manner. As an avowed desire to compass the death of the king is treason, though that wish could never be accomplished; so the determining to maintain friendship with the world, when God commands us to "come out from it and be separate," is treason against the King of kings! The very willing to side in this manner with the world, constitutes us enemies of God.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. The friends of the world—~~***

It is to be feared that even in a Christian assembly the doctrine of the text will be called in question; and that many, whose conduct in other respects is unimpeachable, impute no blame to themselves for their attachment to the world. Yes, so ignorant of their duty are the generality of professing Christians, that we must say to them, "Don't you know that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?" For, alas! few in this day seem to know it, or even to suspect it: and their reply to us would be, 'No, I neither know it, nor believe it; nor shall anything that you can say persuade me to receive a sentiment so unreasonable, and so contrary to common sense!'

But, brethren, so it is, whether you know it or not. Let none therefore deceive themselves, or attempt to unite the friendship of the world with friendship with God; for that is impossible, as our Lord has plainly told us: "You cannot serve God and mammon."

***~~2. The friends of God—~~***

It is a great mercy to be "delivered from the love of this present world." But we may mistake our experience with respect to this. Age, sickness, poverty, disappointment, and other trials may render us apparently indifferent to the world, while yet, under other circumstances, our old attachment to it would revive. Let us take care therefore that, *as an evidence of our friendship with God, our delight in him proportionally increase*. This must of necessity accompany our deadness to the world. As one scale descends, the other must rise. We must guard also against a relapse; for the world is ever soliciting a place in our affections; and If we are not on our guard, we shall, like Demas, forsake the path of self-denial for the more enchanting one of worldliness and self-indulgence! [2 Timothy 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.10).

***~~#2371~~***

***~~REPENTANCE URGED~~***

***~~[James 4:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.8-10)~~***

"Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up."

This season has been set apart by the Church for the purpose of calling all her members to deep humiliation of soul before God: and, were it observed according to the intention of those who destined it to this holy use, there can be no doubt but that it would tend exceedingly to the advancement of religion in the world. So, at least, the reformers of our Church judged; as appears from the peculiarly solemn service which is appointed for the day with which this season commences. And I cannot but think, that, while we value ourselves on an increased freedom from the errors of Romish superstition, we have reason to fear that we have suffered loss in respect of real piety; since, with the forms of religion, we have relinquished also, in no small degree, the spirit of it. Not that a befitting reverence for this season has altogether ceased. On the contrary, a discourse which was not pertinent to the occasion would very generally be deemed unseasonable and indecorous: so that I have at least your prejudices and your expectations in my favor, while I propose to your consideration the solemn subject before us.

In James' exhortation we see,

***~~I. An encouragement to repentance—~~***

***~~A person under conviction of sin is apt to fear that God will not receive him in mercy—~~***

Nor is this without reason, when we consider how awfully we have all departed from our God. Though "in him we live and move and have our being," and are bound by all possible ties to obey and honor him—many mere professors have altogether "despised, [Psalm 10:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 10.13)," his authority, and "lived without him in the world, [Ephesians 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.12)." They have in our hearts said to him, "Depart from me; for I desire not the knowledge of your ways, [Job 21:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 21.14)." They have altogether "forgotten him, [Jeremiah 2:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.32)," and wished that there were "no God, [Psalm 14:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 14.1)," or, at least, that, as to his claims upon us, he might be "made to cease from before us, [Isaiah 30:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 30.11)."

Would it be astonishing, therefore, if God, in his righteous indignation, would execute on all, what he certainly will execute on every impenitent offender, a sentence of utter and everlasting exclusion from his presence! [Proverbs 1:24-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 1.24-31). This is merited by all; and therefore might well be apprehended by all, if God, of his unbounded mercy, had not assured us of his willingness to receive returning penitents.

***~~But God has declared that if we draw near to him, that he will draw near to us—~~***

He will not despise the prayer of the poor destitute, [Psalm 102:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 102.17)," or "cast out any who come unto him" in his Son's name, [John 6:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.37). However great or long-continued their sins may have been, he will not withhold his mercy from them, [Isaiah 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.18). No, in truth: "he will incline his ear unto them, and hear them:" he will "look down upon them from the habitation of his holiness and his glory, [Isaiah 63:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 63.15);" yes, "he will rend the heavens, and come down! [Isaiah 64:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 64.1);" and "at their cry he will answer: Here I am! [Isaiah 58:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.9)." Even "before the supplication is well uttered, he will answer; and while they are yet speaking, he will hear, [Isaiah 65:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 65.24)."

No language can express the depth of the condescension which he will manifest to the poor suppliant, or the riches of that grace which he will impart to the believing penitent. *Pardon, peace, holiness, glory—are not too great for him to bestow on the most unworthy of men, who call upon him with their whole hearts.*

But, that we may not miscarry in the exercise of this duty, the Apostle gives us,

***~~II. A direction for the acceptable performance of it—~~***

Our repentance must be attended with:

***~~1. A sincere renunciation of all sin—~~***

Oh! "cleanse your hands, you sinners;" and do not think to find acceptance with God, while you "hold fast iniquity" of any kind. Hear what God said to his people of old: "When you come to appear before me, who has required this at your hands, to tread my courts? When you spread forth your hands, I will hide my eyes from you. Yes, when you make many prayers, I will not hear—your hands are full of blood. Wash; make yourself clean; put away the evil of your doings from before my eyes: cease to do evil: learn to do well, [Isaiah 1:12-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.12-16)."

In truth, "the very prayers of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord, [Proverbs 21:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 21.27); [Proverbs 28:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.9)." Look, I beg you, to all the habits of your past life; your conduct in your respective trades and callings, no less than in your common fellowship with mankind: and, as God enjoins you to "shake your hands from holding of bribes;" so I would say: Shake your hands from holding of unjust gains of any kind, and from retaining any evil which you have been accustomed to perpetrate, [Isaiah 33:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 33.15).

Nor is this sufficient—you must put away evil from the heart, as well as in the act: for "if you regard iniquity in your heart, the Lord will not hear you, [Psalm 66:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 66.18)." "Your heart must be right with God, [Psalm 78:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.37)," who demands the whole of it for himself, [Proverbs 23:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 23.26), and will not accept "a divided heart, [Hosea 10:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 10.2)."

"Purify your hearts then, you double-minded:" for "you cannot serve God and mammon too, [Matthew 6:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.24)." You must "not love the world, nor anything that is in it," if you would approve yourselves to God, [1 John 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.15-16); the very desire to retain friendship with the world is constructive treason, and a decisive proof of enmity against God, verse 4. See, then, that you be "Israelites indeed, in whom is no allowed deceit, [John 1:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.47)." Then, whether it be "under the fig-tree," or in any place whatever, God will behold you with delight; and not only listen to your prayers, but exceed in his answers to your largest petitions or desires, [John 1:48-51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.48-51) with [Ephesians 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.20).

***~~2. A deep contrition for all your past iniquities—~~***

A forsaking of sin is not sufficient. There are many grounds on which some lust may be subdued: a change of age, or even of our circumstances in life, may operate to the abstaining from some sins, while yet the evil of them may never have been truly felt. *Sin, of whatever kind, is hateful in the sight of God; and must become so in our eyes.*"Be afflicted therefore, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy into heaviness: humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, if ever you would be lifted up." It is "the broken and contrite heart, which God will not despise, [Psalm 51:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.17);" and all repentance that falls short of that, will only prove "a repentance that must itself be repented of, [2 Corinthians 7:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.10-11)."

But, if you come to God with a holy and sincere shame, even though you had been as wicked as Manasseh himself, you shall not be rejected: for "all manner of wickedness shall be forgiven unto men, [Matthew 12:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.31);" nor will God ever allow any human being to "seek his face in vain, [Isaiah 45:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.19)." No, truly; if he sees one prostrating himself before him in dust and ashes, he will "lift him up," just as the father in the parable did his prodigal son; testifying over him the joy with which he will restore him, not to his favor only, but to all the blessedness that he himself is able to impart, [Luke 15:20-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 15.20-24). He who thus sows in tears, shall surely "reap in joy, [Psalm 126:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 126.6);" and "he who thus humbles himself, shall surely be exalted, [Luke 18:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.14)."

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

***~~1. It may be, that some among you doubt the necessity of such a repentance—~~***

But who among you is not "a sinner" before God? Or, who among you has not been "double-minded," giving at least a portion of his heart to the creature, when the whole of it should have been fixed on God? I accuse not any one among you of gross sin: but as corresponding with the character drawn in my text, I must accuse every man. I grant there is a great diversity in the guilt of different men: but *there is no man so innocent as not to need repentance, and repentance too of the very kind that is here required.*I beg you therefore, brethren, not to rest satisfied with a few faint acknowledgments of your guilt; but to abase yourselves before God, even as holy Job did, in dust and ashes.

***~~2. There may possibly be others, also, who doubt the efficacy of repentance—~~***

You may perhaps have sought the Lord for some time, and not yet have obtained an answer of peace. But does this discourage you? Think, I beg you, how long God sought after you, and followed you with his invitations and entreaties to return unto him. Think, I say, of this; and then you will acknowledge, that, if you cried to him for a hundred years, and yet obtained an answer only at the last hour, you would have no reason to complain. But God has gracious designs in delaying the manifestations of his favor towards you. He desires to humble you the more deeply before him, and to prepare you more fully for the due reception of his favor. Peter says, "Humble yourselves under his mighty hand, and he will exalt you in due time, [1 Peter 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.6)." And who is the best judge what that "due time" is? Surely you may well leave this matter to Him who cannot err; and who, "having given you his dear Son, will surely with him also freely give you all things, [Romans 8:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.32)." You yourselves do not give to your child a thing the instant that he cries for it, but judge of the fittest season wherein to give it. Wait, then, the Lord's leisure; assured, that "the vision, though delayed, shall not tarry" beyond the period which you yourselves, if you saw things as clearly as God does, would be the foremost to assign for it! [Habakkuk 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 2.3).

***~~#2372~~***

***~~THE FOLLY OF UNDUE SECURITY~~***

**[James 4:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.13-14)**

"Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money."

Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes."

Religion has ever a tendency to decline. Sin has pre-occupied the ground: and though religion expels it for a time, sin is ever watching, as it were, for an opportunity to return, and to regain its former ascendant over the soul. Even in the Apostolic age manifold declensions were found, not only in individuals, but in whole Churches. James, with the utmost fidelity and earnestness, set himself to counteract the fatal evil.

Among the various evils which he had to reprove, was that of undue security, or of presuming on the success of our plans for future advancement, without any befitting reference to the shortness and uncertainty of life, and the will of God. There being still but too much reason to complain of this habit in the Christian world, I shall distinctly mark:

***~~I. The habit which is here censured—~~***

The Apostle does not intend to condemn all forethought and planning; for then we would all be as weak and foolish as children. Indeed, if prospective plans were unlawful, would any one branch of agriculture or commerce, or even of liberal education, be carried forward. *It is the proud reliance on our own wisdom, and the confident expectation of time to come, that is here condemned*; and this is:

***~~1. A great evil—~~***

What is it but an entire forgetfulness of our dependence upon God? For who is it that can give success to any plans, but God himself? And, if we could command success, who can tell whether that which we seek as a blessing, may not prove to us to be the greatest curse? Even *an unqualified desire of the things themselves, without a reference to the wisdom of God to choose for us, and his will to bestow them on us, is highly sinful*. It contravenes that express command, "You shall not covet," and is, in fact, a usurpation of God's prerogative to direct and govern the affairs of men. Besides, such a confident expectation of life is of itself most offensive to God: for it is "he who holds our souls in life," "in him we live, and move, and have our being," and *the contemplation of life, irrespective of his agency, is no other than practical atheism!*

***~~2. A common evil—~~***

We imbibe these atheistic opinions from our earliest infancy. Scarcely any other ever meets our ears. Our very parents are constantly speaking to us of what is to be gained in the future years in consequence of our own care and industry. As we grow up, we buoy up ourselves with the same unqualified hopes and expectations: from youth to manhood, and from manhood to old age, *we still continue to speak of future events as depending on ourselves, rather than on God; and seldom, if ever, have any direct reference in our minds to the superintending and all-directing providence of God*. Indeed, it is from hence that our exertions principally arise: and so gratifying to our minds is this corrupt habit, that our chief happiness in life arises from it: for it is a well-known fact, that *the fond dreams of hope almost invariably exceed the pleasures of actual enjoyment*.

Such is the evil which the Apostle censured in the words before us: which, however, lead us yet further to consider,

***~~II. The folly of it—~~***

***~~There is nothing in reality at our command, or under our control.~~***

***~~1. We cannot by any means secure the success of our labors—~~***

"Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes!" We cannot tell how soon circumstances may arise to make us view that as an evil, which we just before coveted as a good. The fact is, that there is scarcely a man living, who has not as much reason to bless God for the dispensations by which his desires have been thwarted, as for those by which they have been gratified. *How foolish then is it to take the disposal of events out of God's hands, instead of committing it to him, whose wisdom cannot err, and whose power cannot be counteracted!*We may, like Israel, cause him "in wrath to give us" the object of our inordinate desires, and constrain him to inflict upon us the judgment denounced against his disobedient people, "I will curse their blessings!"

***~~2. We cannot by any means secure the continuance of our lives—~~***

"What is our life? It is a mist that appears but a little time, and then vanishes away." This is a truth which all acknowledge; and which, if duly considered, would abate the ardor of our earthly pursuits, and moderate our too hopeful expectations. Who has not seen persons in the bloom of youth, when promising themselves years of prosperity and joy—cut off suddenly, even as the flower of the grass, which in the morning looks mirthful and flourishing, and in the evening is cut down, dried up, and withered? *Yes, a light, airy, unsubstantial vapor is but too just an image of life, which in its best estate is vanity, and in the twinkling of an eye may pass away forever!*

Is it wise then to be either looking forward to future joys, or resting too confidently in joys possessed, when for anything that we know, the decree may have already gone forth, "This year," this month, this very day, "you shall die! [Jeremiah 28:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 28.16)."

***~~Let us learn from this subject,~~***

***~~1. To have a direct reference to God in all things—~~***

[James 4:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.15-16), "Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil."

God will govern all things, whether we acknowledge him or not: and, if we refer all to him, he will govern all things for our good. Not a hair of our head shall fall to the ground without his special permission.

***~~2. To be moderate in our anticipations of earthly bliss—~~***

What a lesson is taught us by the fate of him who said to his soul, "Soul, you have much goods laid up for many years; eat, drink, and be merry." The reply of God to him was, "You fool, this night shall your soul be required of you!" *The true way to avoid disappointment from earthly things, is, to regard them as vanity and vexation of spirit, and to be contented with such a measure of them as God sees to be best for us.*

***~~3. To bend all our attention to the concerns of eternity—~~***

These will never disappoint our hopes: we shall never seek eternal happiness in vain. Our desires in reference to them cannot be too large, nor our expectations from them too hopeful. Who, on coming to our blessed Savior, was ever cast out? In what instance did the blood of Christ ever prove insufficient to justify, or his grace to save? As for life, the cutting short of that will not deprive us of any blessing which we have ever sought: on the contrary, it will bring us to the speedier possession of all good! We must indeed, in spiritual as well as carnal things, place our hope in God alone; because God alone can "give us either to will or to do;" and in the bestowment of his blessings he will consult only "his own will and pleasure:" but if we look steadfastly to him, and rely confidently on him alone, "we shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end."

***~~#2373~~***

***~~SINS OF OMISSION CONSIDERED~~***

***~~[James 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.17)~~***

"Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins."

There is nothing of which men are more convinced, than the shortness and uncertainty of life; yet in the habit of their minds they live as if they were certain of many months and years to come. They form their plans and projects as if they were sure of living to see them executed. Of this the Apostle complains in the preceding context, because *it altogether overlooks God in the government of the world, and is nothing less than practical atheism.*

Having pointed out the evil of such a habit, the Apostle deduces from it this general position; that, as the person who in *theory*acknowledges the providence of God, and *practically*denies it, sins. Just so, whoever omits to do any other thing which he knows to be right, sins also.

It is my intention,

***~~I. To confirm this truth—~~***

Let us consider what such conduct manifests:

***~~1. Such atheistic conduct manifests an insensibility in the conscience—~~***

God has given to every man a *conscience*, to be, as it were, his vice-regent in the soul. It is designed by him to check us, when we are in danger of committing any evil, and to stimulate us continually to whatever is pleasing in his sight. But if, when we know what is good, we do it not, we show that we have silenced the voice of conscience, or have rendered ourselves incapable of attending to its suggestions. And is this no sin?

Is a sentinel who sleeps at his post guilty of no crime, when through his unwatchfulness a camp or city is surprised? And is not a minister, who, when he sees the sword of God's vengeance uplifted to strike his people, neglects to warn them—justly chargeable with their blood! [Ezekiel 33:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.6). Shall not guilt then attach to you, who lull your consciences asleep, and say to yourselves, "I shall have peace, notwithstanding I walk after the imagination of my own evil heart! [Deuteronomy 29:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 29.19-20)." The very heathen were charged with guilt, because, "when from the works of creation they knew God, they glorified him not as God, [Romans 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.21);" depend upon it, therefore, that your neglect of known and acknowledged duties cannot but involve your souls also in much guilt.

***~~2. Such atheistical conduct manifests an indifference to the welfare of our own souls—~~***

It is by our works that we shall be judged in the last day. We are as servants that have talents committed to us. Those who make a good improvement of them will have a proportionable reward: but those who hide them in a napkin will be dealt with as wicked and unprofitable servants, [Luke 19:15-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.15-27).

What then do you say, in fact, when you neglect an acknowledged duty? You say, in reality, 'I care not for my soul; I care not whether it is happy in a future world, or not. I know that by a diligent attention to all God's commands, I might advance its eternal interests: and I know that by inattention to his will I shall involve it in misery: but let me have present ease; let me be excused the trouble of doing what does not suit my taste and inclination: let me have the world with its pleasures and interests: and if through my love to present things I must lose my soul, be it so: I consent to "the exchange, [Matthew 16:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.26);" "I will sell my birth-right for a bowl of pottage, [Hebrews 12:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.16)." '

Tell me now: Is there nothing criminal in this? May not such persons be justly charged with "loving death, and wronging their own souls, [Proverbs 8:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 8.36)." Yes, whether a man does a thing of which he doubts the lawfulness, or neglects to do a thing of which he admits the necessity, he is equally "a sinner against his own soul." For, as "whatever is not of faith, is sin, [Romans 14:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.23)," so to know what is good and to neglect it, is sin also.

***~~3. Such atheistical conduct manifests a contempt of Almighty God—~~***

Whatever obedience a man may pay to all other commandments, if there is one which he knowingly violates, or willfully neglects, he is a rebel against God, and a despiser of his Divine Majesty, [Psalm 10:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 10.13). [Luke 10:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 10.16). For the same authority that enjoins one, enjoins all: and if it is disregarded in one, it is in reality disregarded in all, [James 2:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.10-11); for it is impossible to have a due regard to it in anything, if we have not a regard to it in everything.

And is it no sin to cast off the yoke of God, and to say, "As for the word that has been spoken to me in the name of the Lord, I will not hearken unto it, [Jeremiah 44:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 44.16)." Our blessed Lord has told us what he will say to such persons in the last day: "Bring hither those that were my enemies, who would not have me to reign over them, and slay them before me!" "Those who knew not their Lord's will," and sinned through ignorance, are chargeable with guilt, and will be visited with punishment; because they had the means of instruction, and did not diligently improve them. But if "the servant who knew not his Lord's will shall be beaten with few stripes, be assured, that the servant who knew his Lord's will and did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes, [Luke 12:47-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.47-48)."

Truly this is a solemn truth, and deeply to be weighed by every man. Let me therefore proceed,

***~~II. To suggest some reflections arising out of it—~~***

Who that duly considers it must not see:

***~~1. What ground we all have for humiliation before God—~~***

I will suppose that we have never committed any enormous sin, and that in respect of the letter of the law we have been as blameless as ever Paul was previous to his conversion: still, are we not sinners? There has been no doubt on any of our minds whether we had occasion for the acknowledged duties of repentance, faith, and obedience: but have we diligently performed these duties?

Have we from day to day humbled ourselves before God, and wept in dust and ashes?

Have we labored to find out all our past transgressions, to spread them before God with penitential sorrow, and to implore with all earnestness the remission of them?

Have we fled to the Lord Jesus Christ for refuge, as to the hope that is set before us?

Have we pleaded before God the merit of his sacrifice, and sprinkled our souls with his all-atoning blood?

Is this the daily habit of our minds; and the only source of peace to our souls?

Have we given up ourselves to God without reserve, to fulfill his every command, and to live altogether to his glory?

Do we for this end study his blessed word with all diligence, that we may know his mind?

Do we labor incessantly to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God?"

We have *known*these things to be right; but have we *done*them? Can we appeal to the heart-searching God, that this has been, and yet is, the daily tenor of our lives? Must we not rather acknowledge, that no one day of our lives has been so occupied with these duties as it ought to have been? Then we are sinners, "sinners before the Lord exceedingly, [Genesis 13:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 13.13);" and, if we turn not to God in newness of life, we shall speedily become monuments of his wrath and fiery indignation.

***~~2. The folly of seeking salvation by any righteousness of our own—~~***

I will not only grant, as before, that we are free from any gross sins, but I will admit, that we have done a great deal that was good and praiseworthy. But *how shall we get rid of this immense load of guilt which we have contracted by our willful and habitual neglects?*Our good deeds, admitting that we have performed some, have been only occasional: whereas our neglects have been continual, from the first moment that we began to be capable of acting. Our *good deeds*have all been marred with imperfections; but our *neglects*have had in them no mixture of good: they were pure and unmixed evil; and in comparison with them, any good that we do is lighter than dust upon the balance!

In truth, no man who reflected a moment on my text could any more entertain a hope of being justified by any righteousness of his own, than he could form a purpose to create a world. He would see, that, while he was doing those very works on which he was inclined to build his hopes, the weakness and defectiveness of his exertions infinitely outweighed any merit which they might be supposed to have; and rendered his works a just ground for condemnation, rather than of justification before God.

Bear in mind then the declaration before us; and limit not your views to sins of *commission*, but extend them to sins of *omission*; and then you will no longer hesitate to renounce all hope in yourselves, but will say with the Apostle Paul, "I desire to be found in Christ, not having my own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith, [Philippians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.9)."

***~~3. The improvement which we should make of divine ordinances—~~***

We would not come to the house of God merely to satisfy conscience and to perform a duty, but really to get instruction respecting the mind and will of God. A mariner about to navigate a ship, and having the assistance of a skillful builder to examine whether she was in a state fit for sea—would not listen to his observations as a mere matter of curiosity or amusement, nor would he shut his eyes to any defects that were pointed out. His object would be, to find out defects, in order to their being remedied: and if only a doubt were suggested, he would endeavor to ascertain how far there was any foundation for it. He would say, I am about to commit my life and property to this vessel, and I must not wait until I am got into the midst of the ocean before I search into her state: it will be too late to do that when I am in the midst of a storm: I must do it now, before I go on board.

Precisely in this way would you come up to the house of God. You are about to embark for eternity! and the instructions given by your minister are intended to point out every defect in your vessel, in order to its being remedied in time. Shut not then your ears to his instructions; and close not your eyes to your defects: but bless God for every assistance which you can obtain in a matter of such infinite importance, and endeavor to improve it for the salvation of your soul.

In particular, search out your defects; and cry mightily to God to pardon them for the Redeemer's sake, and to repair them by the influences of his Spirit. So may you hope to navigate in safety this tempestuous ocean; and in due season to "have an abundant entrance" into the haven of eternal bliss!

***~~#2374~~***

***~~PATIENT PERSEVERANCE URGED~~***

***~~[James 5:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.7-8)~~***

"Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near."

*Christianity, even in the apostolic age, was professed by multitudes who neither understood its doctrines nor obeyed its precepts*. The great and fundamental doctrine of justification by faith was denied by some, and abused by others; who took occasion from it to "turn the grace of God into license for sin," and to "continue in sin that grace might abound." To this latter class more especially James directed his epistle. He did indeed write to the unbelieving Jews also: for his epistle is addressed "To the twelve tribes who were scattered abroad:" and, as they were in no state to receive such affectionate salutations as are observable in the epistles which were addressed to Christians only, he contented himself with merely sending to them "greetings, [James 1:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.1)." There were indeed many truly pious persons who were suffering for the truth's sake; and these he sought to comfort and encourage.

The foregoing part of this chapter seems addressed to the former; the text and following, verses to the latter. We cannot conceive that the oppressive and murderous conduct which he lays to the charge of some, could admit of their being numbered with the Church of God. But their cruelties rendered the path of the true Christians who were among them far more difficult: and therefore, after warning those who were so grossly violating every principle of common morality, he encourages the suffering Christians to persevere in a patient discharge of their duty, and in an assured expectation of recompense at the coming of their Lord.

We shall consider the injunction which he gives them in a two-fold view:

***~~I. In reference to the terms by which it is expressed—~~***

These are strong and energetic. Twice he says, "Be patient;" that is, bear with all long-suffering the trials that are come upon you: and then he adds, "Establish your hearts;" let them be so firmly fixed, that nothing may ever shake them.

Now from these expressions we gain a very considerable insight into Christianity; we see, that,

***~~1. It exposes us to heavy trials—~~***

No man could profess Christianity at its first establishment, but at the peril of his life: thousands and myriads being called to seal the truth with their blood. If the same persecutions are not experienced at this day, let us not imagine that they have therefore ceased: for it is as true at this day as it was in the apostolic age, that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." And every man now, as well as then, must be prepared to lay down his life for Christ, if he will be acknowledged as "a disciple indeed." Nor let it be thought that the persecutions of the present day are so very light. *It is no easy thing for flesh and blood to withstand the hatred, and contempt, and ridicule to which he will be assuredly exposed, if he sets himself in earnest to serve the Lord*. The fear of these consequences is abundantly sufficient to deter multitudes from embracing the Gospel, and to turn back multitudes after they have embraced it. True it is, that all are not exposed to these things in an equal degree: but every follower of Christ must have his cross to bear, and be conformed to his Divine Master in sufferings, before he can be made like him in glory, [Romans 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.17).

***~~2. It calls for great exertions—~~***

Religion is the same that it ever was, and calls for the same efforts on the part of all who embrace it.

A *race*is not won at this day without exertion;

nor does a *wrestler*overcome a strong antagonist without effort;

nor a man engaged in *warfare*obtain a triumph without labor.

Our spiritual enemies are as strong as ever: *sin is not subdued and mortified by listless endeavors*; nor is Satan defeated without much watchfulness and prayer. The whole man must be engaged. We must summon to the conflict all our faculties and powers; yes, such are the efforts required, that, if we are not strengthened by that same almighty power which raised Jesus Christ from the dead, we can never prevail! [Ephesians 1:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.19-20).

***~~3. It requires incessant efforts even to the end—~~***

There is to be no period when we are to give way either to impatience or sloth. However long our trials may continue, we are "in patience to possess our souls:" and however difficult the path of duty may be, we are "never to be weary in well-doing." God should be able to say of us, as he does of the Church of Ephesus, "You have borne, and have patience, and for my name's sake have labored, and not fainted, [Revelation 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.3)." This in particular is intimated in our text. It is supposed that the trials are long, and heavy, and calculated to turn us from the faith: and hence it is necessary that we "be long-suffering," and that our "souls be established with grace." It is in this way only that we can finally prevail: for to those only who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, will eternal life be adjudged! [Romans 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.7).

To enter fully into James' exhortation, we must consider it,

***~~II. In reference to the comparison with which it is illustrated—~~***

James seems particularly to affect easy and familiar illustrations. The whole epistle abounds with them. He compares certain hearers of the word to persons beholding themselves in a looking-glass, and then forgetting what manner of persons they were.

Those who have *a dead and unproductive faith*,he compares to persons who speak kind words to an indigent brother or sister without relieving their necessities.

Those who *do not govern* their tongue, he reproves by contrasting their conduct:  
with horses that obey the bit;  
with ships that are turned by a rudder;  
with beasts, birds, and even fish of the sea, all of which have been tamed by men;  
and by warning them, that as no fountain can send forth sweet water and bitter, and no tree bear both olives and figs, so they can be no true Christians, while such unworthy and inconsistent speeches issue from their mouths.

Here in our text he brings to our view the farmer, whose continued labors and patient expectations form a fit model for the Christian. We are called to resemble the farmer:

***~~1. In a steady prosecution of the appointed means—~~***

Many are the *discouragements*which the gardener meets with in the cultivation of his ground. Sometimes the weather is untoward: sometimes blights, or insects, or mildew, injure his crops: sometimes drought almost destroys all his hopes: but still he goes on from year to year, ploughing his ground, clearing it from weeds, fertilizing it, casting in his seed, and harrowing it; and this he does, not knowing for certain that a single grain which he casts into the furrows shall rise again. But he expects nothing without the use of means; and therefore he does his part; and that too as regularly and diligently as if everything depended on himself. He well knows that God alone can give rain, or cause the sun to shine, or give power to the seed which he has sown to spring up: but still he labors, that he may not fail through any neglect of his own.

Now in this, the farmer is a pattern for all Christians. They have their work to do. True, they cannot assure success: but they know that it is in the use, and not in the neglect, of the appointed means, that God will bless them: and therefore they are laboring as assiduously as if everything depended on themselves. Behold them in secret:  
they read the Scriptures with diligence,  
they pray over them with earnestness,  
they set themselves to mortify their evil propensities, and to fulfill their duties both to God and man.

*Observe them at all times, and you will see, that they are in earnest for Heaven*.

When you go into the fields, and see the ploughing, fertilizing, sowing, harrowing, weeding his ground, you will never hesitate a moment to say, that he has the harvest in view.

Just so, see the Christian from day to day, and you will without fail remark, that he has Heaven in view, and that he is preparing for a future harvest.

***~~2. In a patient expectation of the desired end—~~***

Many months intervene between the seed-time and the harvest: but the gardener waits with patience. It is some time before the seed springs up from under the clods: but he waits for it, and for "the former rain," which alone can call forth its vegetative powers. Its growth is afterwards impeded by drought: but still he waits for the latter rain, without which the corn can never come to maturity. There may be many alternations of hope and fear: but he commits the matter to the Lord, and waits the destined time, in expectation that God will give him to see, in an abundant increase, the fruit of his labors.

Just so, the Christian must wait upon his God: many things he will meet with to try his faith and patience: but he must commit them all to the Lord, not doubting but that God will give him "strength according to his day," and cause "all events to work together for his good."

As the farmer knows that a few months will bring the appointed harvest; so the Christian knows, that his Lord is quickly coming, and "will not tarry beyond the appointed time:" and for that time he must wait; fully assured, that the harvest which he shall then reap, will amply repay all his cares and all his toil.

This then, Christian, is the pattern you are to follow—you must be "steadfast, and immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; and then you are assured that your labor shall not be in vain in the Lord."

***~~Learn then from hence,~~***

***~~1. How to estimate your true character—~~***

The Apostle addresses those whom he is exhorting by the endearing name of "brethren:" for they are all children of one common Father, even of God himself. Now, however they differ from each other, they all agree in this: the true child of God is engaged in a work, which demands, and in which he puts forth, all his energies. In it he is occupied throughout the year. He consults not the clouds, to know whether he shall plough and sow his ground: he knows that the work must be done, and he engages in it in a humble dependence on his God: and he looks to the future judgment, as the period when all his labors shall be compensated, and his hopes fulfilled.

Now, I would ask, would everyone that sees you, know you by these marks? The farmer, without intending to attract notice, reveals to all, his views, his occupations, his desires. Are your views and desires also in like manner apparent to all who behold your life and conduct! Doubtless your daily calls of duty are not so visible to every observer: but upon the whole, the great scope and end of your life is not a whit less visible to all who are round about you.

Here then you may easily ascertain your own character. If eternity is not ever in your view; if all you do have not a reference to it; if you are not willing both to do and suffer everything that may conduce to your future welfare; and if you are not "looking for, and hastening unto, the coming of the day of Christ," as to the period for the completion of all your wishes, you do not belong to this holy family. You may call yourselves Christians; but you are not Christians *indeed*. We read of those who "said that they were Jews, and did lie." Just so, *many profess that they are Christians; but their whole conduct gives the lie to their profession*. If you are Christians in deed and in truth, "your works of faith, and labors of love, and patience of hope, are known to all;" and they vouch for you, that "you are the elect," the children of the living God, [1 Thessalonians 1:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 1.3-4).

***~~2. How to anticipate your certain end—~~***

All imagine that they are going to Heaven; and will not be persuaded to the contrary. But, if you have ears to hear, and hearts to understand, then you shall know this day whether you are going to Heaven or to Hell.

Ask yonder farmer: 'Have you been ploughing and sowing your ground this year?'

'No; I have had other things to do.'

'And do you expect a harvest?'

'Yes, I shall have as good a crop as any of my neighbors.'

'But do you think that you shall obtain the end without the means?'

'Tell me not about means and end: others give themselves a great deal of unnecessary trouble: and I shall have as good a crop as my neighbors: nor shall anyone persuade me to the contrary.'

Now what, suppose you, will be the issue? Will the outcome accord with this man's expectations? Will he not, when the time of harvest comes, find that his confidence has been delusive; and that his barns are empty, while the granaries of others are filled with grain? Then I agree that you shall be your own judges. If you can form a doubt about the outcome of that man's confidence, especially when it is repeated for many years together, then I will be content that you shall buoy up yourselves with the hopes of Heaven, though you never use any means to obtain it. But if you have no doubt about that man's folly, then see in it a just picture of your own!

Behold then, I declare to all of you, that the means must be used in order to the end. You must repent, "ploughing up your fallow ground," and "sowing in tears" of deep contrition. You must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, as the only Savior of sinners; and must look to him for "the former and the latter rain," whereby alone the seed of the word can live and grow in your souls. Lastly, you must make it the one labor of your life to prepare for his second coming, that you may give up your account to him with joy and not with grief. If you thus "go on your way weeping, bearing precious seed, you shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing your sheaves with you! [Psalm 126:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 126.5-6);" but if you act not thus, know that you shall reap according to what you sow. "He who sows to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; while he who sows to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting! [Galatians 6:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.7-8)."

***~~#2375~~***

***~~NEARNESS OF JUDGMENT~~***

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

"Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. Behold! The Judge is standing at the door!"

The Day of Judgment is frequently mentioned in the New Testament: and so strongly was the idea of it realized in the minds of the inspired writers, that they conveyed to the Church, unintentionally on their part, an expectation of its speedy arrival. This arose indeed, in part, from our blessed Lord himself having blended his description of it with a prediction of the judgments which impended over Jerusalem, and which were to be inflicted upon it before that generation would have passed away, [Matthew 24:29-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.29-35). Yet, when there was no reference to the destruction of the Jewish polity, the language used respecting it was often exceeding strong.

Paul, in his first Epistle to the Thessalonians, thus expresses himself: "According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until 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, [1 Thessalonians 4:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.15-17)."

We wonder not that some would mistake his meaning, as we find they did, insomuch that, in his next epistle, he was constrained to rectify their misapprehension of his words, and to bring to their recollection, that he had before told them of many important events, which would occur previous to the arrival of that day, [2 Thessalonians 2:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.1-5).

James speaks of that period in terms of similar aspect with those of the Apostle Paul: "The coming of the Lord draws near, verse 8;" and again, "The Judge stands at the door." Whether, in these passages, James had any reference to the destruction of Jerusalem, I cannot exactly say: it is possible he might; because it would be some consolation to the suffering Christians to know that their oppressors would soon be disarmed of their power: but, beyond a doubt, he chiefly refers to the time appointed for the future judgment, when all the inequalities of this present state will be done away, and every person receive a suitable recompense, according to the injuries he has either inflicted or sustained.

In this view, the Apostle says, "Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged." That is, vent not your indignation against an oppressor, no, not even in an inarticulate sound. The word means "groan." There is a certain vehement, though inarticulate sound, resembling a groan, by which we are apt to express an angry and indignant feeling against one whom we are unable to punish. This is the feeling forbidden in the text, lest the same judgment come on you which you would be ready to inflict on him: but leave the matter to your Almighty "Judge, who stands before the door," ready to "award tribulation to those who trouble you; but to you, who are troubled, rest, [2 Thessalonians 1:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 1.6-7)."

Let us consider:

***~~I. The truth that is here suggested—~~***

To enter into the full meaning of this solemn truth, we must distinctly notice its two leading parts:

***~~1. Death is at hand, to carry us before our Judge—~~***

This is an undoubted truth. The experience of every day attests it. Death lurks within us; and finds in the disordered state of our bodies, ten thousand means of accomplishing our destruction. He lies in ambush, too, in everything around us. There is nothing which may not prove an instrument in his hands to bring us down. Nor is it by disease or accident alone that he can effect his purpose. In instances without number he inflicts the fatal stroke, without so much as employing any visible or acknowledged agent. If only he receives his commission from God, death is able to work either by means or without means. It need only be said, "This night shall your soul be required of you!" and with irresistible power he executes the decree; and transmits us, prepared or unprepared, into the immediate presence of our God.

***~~2. Our Judge is at hand, to pronounce our deserved doom—~~***

He is not afar off, that he must be sought after: nor is he so occupied with the cases of others, as not to be at liberty to consider ours. The instant we are brought before him, he is ready to pronounce his sentence. Of this, the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus is a striking illustration. "All is naked and open before him," at one view; and in one instant of time he can so present everything before our minds, that we also may discern the equity of his sentence.

If at night we wished to see a variety of objects, we must take a light, and view them in succession, one at a time: but if the sun be risen upon the earth, we can see ten thousand objects at once. Thus can the Judge of living and dead, in one instant of time, present to our view the records of our whole life, to serve as a foundation of the sentence that he shall pass upon us.

Some notion of this we may form from the account given us of the Samaritan woman. She had had some conversation with our Lord, who had made known to her one particular circumstance of her life: and with such power was that particular truth accompanied to her soul, that she went home and said, "Come, see a man who has told me all that I ever did! [John 4:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.29)."

Now this omniscient Judge is at the door, ready to pass sentence on us, the very instant we are brought before him: and, if our eyes were opened, as those of Elisha's servant were, [2 Kings 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 6.17), we might see the throne of judgment already set; the Judge himself seated upon it; the books opened before him; the list of the prisoners, according as they are in succession to be brought before him; and the officers ready, both to summon them in their turn, and to execute on all, the sentence awarded to them.

To impress this solemn truth upon your minds, let me proceed to show,

***~~II. The attention it demands—~~***

"Behold! the Judge is standing at the door!" Mark it; contemplate it; act upon it! Surely the consideration of this solemn truth would prevail upon us,

***~~1. To seek without delay the pardon of our past sins—~~***

If we "die in our sins," woe be to us! "it had been better for us never to have been born." But through repentance and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, all our past sins may be forgiven: they may all "be blotted out, as a morning cloud;" yes, though they may have been of a "scarlet or crimson dye, they may be made as white as snow." Would we, then, defer a moment to seek this inestimable blessing? When we know not but that the very next hour we may be summoned into the presence of our Judge, would we endanger the everlasting welfare of our souls by waiting for a more convenient season?

Oh! "Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are in the way with him; lest the adversary deliver you to the Judge, and the Judge deliver you to the officer, and you be cast into prison. Truly, you shall not come out thence, until you have paid the utmost farthing! [Matthew 5:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.25-26)."

***~~2. To guard with all diligence against the incursion of fresh sin—~~***

Remember, that whatever be the state of our souls at the moment of death, that will continue to be our state to all eternity. It may be said, "I have repented long since, and sought for mercy through Christ, and attained to a considerable measure of righteousness." Be it so. Yet must I declare unto you, that "if you relapse into sin, your past righteousness shall not be remembered; but in the iniquity which you have committed, shall you die, [Ezekiel 33:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.13); [Ezekiel 33:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.18)."

There cannot be a more fatal error, than to imagine that your past experience, whatever it may have been, shall avail you anything, if you turn back to sin. So far will it be from screening you from the wrath of God, that it will rather render you liable to it in a tenfold heavier degree! "You only have I known of all the families of Israel; therefore will I punish you for your iniquities, [Amos 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 3.2)."

Hear how strongly God himself has cautioned you against this error: "Be not deceived: God is not mocked: for whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap. He who sows to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption: and he who sows to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting, [Galatians 6:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.7-8)." When, therefore, you consider how suddenly you may be called into the presence of your Judge, it befits you to "keep your garments clean," and to "use all diligence that you may be found by him in peace, without spot, and blameless."

***~~3. To watch in a more especial manner over the secret workings of your hearts—~~***

It is not only our *actions*that our God will call into judgment, but "every secret thing, whether it be good or evil." There is much that is externally "good in the eyes of men, which yet is an abomination in the sight of God! [Luke 16:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.15)."*There may be in the best exercises of our religion much of pride and self-delight; and in our most benevolent actions, also, a mixture of ostentation and vanity.*

Now "God will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart, [1 Corinthians 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.5)." How attentive then should we be to the secret workings of our minds! They are all discerned by God, as clearly as our overt acts: "He searches the heart, and tries the thoughts:" "he weighs the very spirits of men:" and thousands, who took credit to themselves for acting from the best of principles, will be found no better than hypocrites before him. Beloved, know of a truth, that if ever you would find acceptance with your Judge, you must be "Israelites indeed, and without deceit."

***~~4. To improve for your good, every summons which is sent to those around us—~~***

You see in the circumstances now before you, a striking illustration of our text. And does not this event speak to you? What if *you*had been the person summoned into the presence of your Judge: were you prepared to meet him? Would he have found you truly penitent for all your past transgressions; and watchful against every sin, yes, against every degree of evil, even in thought or desire? If not, what would have been your feelings at this moment? Do you not tremble at the thought?

Or, suppose that this night a similar summons would be sent to you, (and you have no security that there will not,) are you ready? *Do not trifle, my beloved brethren, on the very brink of eternity!*But "stand with your loins girt, and your lamps trimmed, as servants waiting for the coming of your Lord." Then, "whether your Lord comes in the morning, or in the evening, or at the cock-crowing, or at midnight," it shall be well with you. In a word, learn to "die daily:" and then it will be a joy to you to reflect, that your Judge is at the door: for the door at which he stands shall no sooner be opened to summon you into his presence, than angels, as his ministering servants, shall bear you from his tribunal to the realms of bliss!

***~~#2376~~***

***~~THE PATIENCE OF JOB~~***

***~~[James 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.11)~~***

"As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy."

One of the most singular ideas that can be suggested to a carnal mind, is that which occurs in the words in the text, "We consider *blessed*those who have persevered." An ungodly man sees that it is better to bear afflictions patiently than to sink under them; but he can scarcely conceive how afflictions, under any circumstances, can become a ground of congratulation. This difficulty, however, is solved by taking into the account "the end" of those afflictions: and it admits of easy illustration from the case of Job.

In prosecuting James' view of this subject, we shall consider,

***~~I. The patience of Job under his afflictions—~~***

***~~The afflictions of Job were great and unparalleled—~~***

The destruction of all his property, and all his servants, by bands of robbers, and by lightning—announced to him as it was in three different accounts, by different messengers in speedy succession, would of itself have been sufficient to overwhelm his mind, if he had not been endued with uncommon fortitude; since by this he was reduced in a moment from the height of opulence and grandeur, to the lowest indigence! [Job 1:13-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.13-17).

But, distressing as these events were, what an inconceivable aggravation must they have received from the tidings delivered by a fourth messenger, the sudden death of all his children! Had he heard of only one child dying, and that by any natural disorder—it should, to such a parent, have been a fearful addition to all his other burdens: but to hear of seven sons, and three daughters, all crushed in a moment by the falling of his house, [Job 1:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.18-19), if it did not bereave him of his senses, we might well expect, that it should, at least, draw forth some murmuring, and unadvised expressions.

To all these calamities were added yet others, that affected more immediately his own person; and which, in such a conjuncture, must be beyond measure afflictive. Satan, having permission to try him to the uttermost, smote him from head to foot with the most loathsome ulcers, insomuch that he was constrained to sit down among the ashes, and to scrape himself with a potsherd, [Job 2:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 2.7-8).

In the midst of all this trouble, one might hope that he would have some comfort in the kind offices of neighbors, the compassion of friends, and the tender assiduities of his wife. But, alas! his servants turned their backs upon him, [Job 19:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 19.15-16); the children in the streets despised and mocked him, [Job 19:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 19.18); the very friends who came to comfort him, loaded him with the most unfounded accusations, and asserted that his sufferings were indications of his peculiar wickedness, which God was now disclosing and punishing! His wife also derided his trust in God, and counseled him to renounce it utterly, yes, to "curse God, and die [Job 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 2.9)."

Take any one of these trials separately, and it was great: but view them collectively, and they exceeded all that ever were endured by mortal man!

***~~They served however to call forth his most unrivaled patience—~~***

Mark his conduct when informed of all his accumulated misfortunes, and especially the loss of all his children: "Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshiped; and said, Naked I came out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return: the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord! [Job 1:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.20-21)."

Behold him yet again after his body was so smitten, and when his wife gave him that desperate, that atheistical, advice: all was meekness still: his very reproof was mild, though firm: "He said unto her: You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?"

Thus "in all this he never once charged God foolishly, or sinned in the least respect, [Job 1:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.22); [Job 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 2.10)."

It is true that, after this, we find him "cursing the day of his birth," and uttering some unwarranted expressions against God: nor would it befit us either to conceal, or to extenuate, his guilt in these respects. Our blessed Lord alone was absolutely without sin. But though Job betrayed his infirmity in some hasty words, yet, on the whole, his argument was right in opposition to that of his friends: and God himself, as the arbiter of the dispute, declared, that "they had not spoken the thing that was right as his servant Job had, [Job 42:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.7)." Moreover, the deep humility with which he acknowledged his offense, proved his title to the character which God had given him in the beginning, that he was the most perfect and upright of the sons of men, [Job 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.8); [Job 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 2.3).

Having taken this view of Job's afflictions, and of his patience under them, let us consider,

***~~II. The design which God had in them—~~***

We, who behold every part of this mysterious dispensation in one view, are enabled, from its catastrophe, to mark the design of God in every intermediate step of the plot. We see what God intended, by what he actually effected.

***~~1. He confounded Satan—~~***

Satan had accused Job as a hypocrite, who, if he were brought into trying circumstances, would even curse God to his face: and he undertook to prove him such a character, if God would only allow him to make the trial. God gave him this permission, [Job 1:9-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.9-12); [Job 2:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 2.4-6), and thereby afforded Satan an occasion to prove himself a liar, and to demonstrate that integrity—the existence of which Satan was so forward to deny.

Nor is this a small consolation to the people of God, whom Satan is ever ready to accuse and harass. When he would persuade them that they are hypocrites, they may recollect, that "he was a liar from the beginning." When he, through Divine permission, assaults them either in body or mind, they may look back to this history, and see, that he can in no respect exceed his commission, or overthrow those who trust in God. He may toss them vehemently as in a sieve; but shall never destroy the smallest grain of solid wheat, [Luke 22:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.31) with [Amos 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 9.9).

***~~2. He exercised and improved the graces of Job—~~***

If "men do not light a candle, in order to put it under a bushel, but that it may give light to those who are in the house, [Matthew 5:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.15)," then we may be sure that *God does not implant his grace in the heart, but with a view to call it into exercise*. Now he had endued Job with such eminent patience, that the common events of life were not sufficient to call it forth: he therefore allowed Satan to exert all his power against him, in order that Job's piety might be displayed, augmented, and confirmed.

Behold the sufferer when coming out of his trial; how bright does he shine, when "abasing himself in dust and ashes!" How eminent does he appear, when God himself not only takes his part, but refuses forgiveness to his uncharitable friends, except as an answer to his intercession for them, [Job 42:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.8). Truly he lost nothing in the furnace but his dross; and "he came out of it purified as gold! [Job 23:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 23.10)."

***~~3. He increased Job's happiness both in this and in the eternal world—~~***

Doubtless the afflictions of Job were inexpressibly severe: yet was he no stranger to consolation even in his most distressing hours. If all his earthly comforts were dead, and he had lost all hope of happiness on this side the grave, still he saw that he had a Redeemer living; and he knew that the day was fast approaching, when he would enjoy an intimate and everlasting communion with him, [Job 19:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 19.25-27).

But beyond all expectation he was raised from his low estate; his family was again increased to the very number he had before lost; his possessions were doubled; and his life, which probably at that time was somewhat advanced, was prolonged a hundred and forty years, that he might see his posterity even to the fourth generation, [Job 42:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.10); [Job 42:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.13); [Job 42:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.16). We must confess, therefore, that *even in this life*he was abundantly recompensed for the months of trouble that he had endured.

How much his eternal happiness was affected by it, it is impossible for us to say: but sure we are that his affliction was the means of greatly augmenting it. In this view, affliction was better to him than Heaven itself would have been: for, if he had been removed to Heaven at once, his state, though glorious, would have been forever fixed: whereas his affliction was "working for him" as long as it continued—it was every moment increasing that weight of glory which he was to possess forever! 2 Corinthians 4:17.

Who does not see that it would be better for one to be cut off and be cast into Hell immediately, than to live only to "treasure up wrath against the day of wrath [Romans 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.5)," for though his torments would come upon him a little sooner—yet the respite of a few months, or years, would bear no proportion to the increased weight of misery that he must eternally endure! And exactly thus the additional weight of glory which Job will eternally possess, will far overbalance the trials he suffered, or the short period of bliss, which, by an earlier removal, he might have enjoyed.

To make the just improvement of this history, we must notice,

***~~III. The general character of God, as it is exhibited in this particular dispensation—~~***

This seems to be the more immediate object, to which James would direct our attention. Persons in the midst of their trouble are apt to entertain harsh thoughts of God: but we who, in this instance, "have seen the end of the Lord," may rest assured "that he is very pitiful, and of tender mercy," however dark or painful his dispensations towards us may be. It is by love alone he is actuated:

***~~1. In sending afflictions—~~***

God does "not willingly afflict his people, [Lamentations 3:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 3.33)." He knows what we stand in need of; and he sends afflictions for our good. He chastises us, not as earthly parents too often do, to indulge their own evil tempers, but purely "for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness, [Hebrews 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.10)."

As he knows what we need, so he knows what we can bear; and will take care either to apportion our burden to our strength, 1 Corinthians 10:13, or to give us strength sufficient for our trials, [Deuteronomy 33:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 33.25). Besides, in all our afflictions he sympathizes with us, [Isaiah 63:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 63.9); he watches over us with the care of a refiner, [Malachi 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.3), and the solicitude of a tender parent, [Psalm 103:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 103.13). When he sees that his rod has produced its desired effect, he is glad to return to us in the endearments of love, and to confirm our confidence in him by the sweetest tokens of reconciliation and acceptance, [Jeremiah 31:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.20).

***~~2. In multiplying afflictions—~~***

When our troubles, like those of Job, are many and various, we are ready to conclude that they are sent in wrath. But it is not for us to prescribe how many, or of what continuance, our afflictions shall be. We must consider God as a physician, who prescribes with unerring wisdom, and consults the benefit, rather than the inclination, of his patients.

We must "walk by faith, and not by sight:" it will be time enough hereafter to see the reasons of God's procedure, [John 13:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.7). Job was induced at last to account God his enemy: and those who beheld the afflictions of Christ, were ready to say, that "he was judicially stricken, and smitten of God" as the most abandoned of mankind, [Isaiah 53:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.4). But we know that, as Job was, so was Christ, beloved of the Father; and never more beloved than when crying in the depths of his passion, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!"

Let not any then "write bitter things against themselves" on account of the greatness of their afflictions, but rather accept their trials as tokens of his love; for, "whom he loves he chastens; and scourges every son whom he receives, [Hebrews 12:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.6)."

***~~Advice—~~***

***~~1. Let none be secure, as though affliction were far off from them—~~***

We may be today in affluence, tomorrow in poverty;

today in health, tomorrow languishing on a bed of sickness; today enjoying the society of wife or children, tomorrow lamenting their loss.

Let us ever remember, that *whatever we have is God's; it is only lent us for a little while, to be recalled at any hour he shall see fit*. Let us learn to hold everything as by this tenure, that we may be ready at any moment to give up whatever he shall be pleased to require of us. Since "we know not what a day may bring forth," we would stand girt for the service of our God, ever ready to *do*or *suffer*his righteous will.

***~~2. Let none be hasty in their judgments, when called to suffer—~~***

*Jacob* thought all his trials were against him; when, in fact, they were designed for the good of himself and of all his family, [Genesis 42:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 42.36). [Genesis 45:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 45.5), [7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Genesis 45.7). [Genesis 50:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 50.20). And we know not but that the events we so deeply bewail, are indispensably necessary to our salvation. We have reason to think that, if we saw the end as God does, we, instead of regarding our losses or bereavements as needless afflictions, would adore God for them as much as for the most pleasing of his dispensations. Let us then wait until he shall have revealed to us the whole of his designs; and be content to form our judgment of him when all the grounds of judging are laid before us.

***~~#2377~~***

***~~THE EFFICACY OF FERVENT PRAYER~~***

***~~[James 5:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.16)~~***

"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."

Prayer and intercession are generally considered as *duties*: but, if viewed aright, they would rather be regarded as *privileges*; seeing that they are the means of obtaining for ourselves and others those blessings which no created being can bestow. In this point of view, the passage before us, together with the preceding context, affords us the greatest possible encouragement.

[N.B. In the following section Simeon is referring to the Catholic sacrament of "Extreme Unction" now known as the "Sacrament of the Sick".]

It is to be regretted, however, that instead of making a due improvement of these gracious declarations, the Papists have made use of them chiefly, if not solely, to advance the temporal interests of their clergy, at the expense of the eternal welfare of the laity. On the direction given to "pray over a sick person, and to anoint him with oil in order to his recovery, verse 14, 15. The forgiveness of sin here mentioned refers only to the removal of any particular judgment that had been inflicted on account of sin. See [John 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.14) and [1 Corinthians 11:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 11.30)," the Papists have founded an ordinance, to be observed when a man is absolutely past recovery: and that which was designed by God as emblematic only of a miraculous power, given at that time for the restoration of bodily health, the Papists have established as the essential means in all ages of saving the immortal soul.

[N.B. In the following section Simeon is referring to the Catholic sacrament of "Penance" or "Confession" to a priest in order to have sins forgiven.]

Again, because the saints are encouraged to "confess their faults one to another," with a view to the augmenting of their mutual sympathy, and the directing of them in their mutual intercessions, verse 16—these deceivers have required the laity to confess their sins to the clergy, in order to their obtaining the forgiveness of them at the hands of God. Whereas, according to James, there is no such deference due to any particular order of men; but the confession is as much required from the clergy to the laity, as from the laity to the clergy.

We will not stop to address these grievous errors, but pass on to that which more immediately concerns ourselves; and to point out to you,

***~~I. The import of the assertion before us—~~***

The preceding context certainly leads our thoughts chiefly to the work of intercession: yet since it is also said, "Is any afflicted, let him pray, verse 13," we must not confine our attention to prayer as offered for others, but must notice it also as offered for ourselves. We say then, that when "a righteous man" draws near to God, and presents before him prayers inspired and dictated by the Holy Spirit (whose peculiar office it is to "help our infirmities" in prayer, [Romans 8:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.26), and to "make intercession for us, [Romans 8:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.27)")

***~~1. He shall prevail for others—~~***

Of this the instances are so numerous, that we can only give a short specimen of them: yet shall it be such a specimen, as will abundantly confirm the truth before us.

We will begin with Moses, who, when God was exceedingly angry with his people for making and worshiping the golden calf, set himself to pray and intercede for them. But God, feeling, if I may so say, how impossible it would be for him to resist the importunity of his servant, said, "Let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them; and," if you think that my covenant with Abraham will be broken thereby, I assure you it shall not; for "I will make of you a great nation, [Exodus 32:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 32.10)." But Moses would not "let him alone," but pleaded for them with all imaginable earnestness and importunity. The consequence was, "The LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened, [Exodus 32:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 32.14)."

My next instance shall be that of Joshua, who, desiring to prosecute the advantage which he had gained over the Amorites, and destroy them utterly, prayed that neither the sun nor moon might advance in their course, but continue to aid him with their light, until he had accomplished his desire. To effect this, the whole universe must be arrested in its career; and such a shock be given to it, as to endanger its utter dissolution. But whatever stood in the way, it must yield to his prayer. Accordingly, no sooner did this righteous man outcome the command, "O sun, stand still over Gibeon, O moon, over the Valley of Aijalon." So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, until the nation avenged itself on its enemies, as it is written in the Book of Jashar. The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day. There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the LORD listened to a man, [Joshua 10:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 10.12-14)." Here we have seen all the material creation stopped by the voice of prayer!

Now we will refer to another instance, wherein Heaven itself is moved, and an angel sent from thence to fulfill the petitions of two chosen servants. Jerusalem was besieged, and utterly incapable of holding out against the enemy who was come against it. But Hezekiah and Isaiah betook themselves to prayer. And what was the result? An angel was sent from Heaven to destroy, in one single night, one hundred and eighty-five thousand of the besieging army: and the blaspheming monarch, who had boasted that nothing could withstand him, was forced to return immediately to his own country, where he was slain by his own sons, while in the very act of worshiping the senseless idol in which he had trusted for success. For this cause, says the historian, "King Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz cried out in prayer to Heaven about this. And the LORD sent an angel, who annihilated all the fighting men and the leaders and officers in the camp of the Assyrian king. So he withdrew to his own land in disgrace. And when he went into the temple of his God, some of his sons cut him down with the sword, [2 Chronicles 32:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 32.20-21)."

One more instance I will mention, in order to show how immediately the prayer of a righteous man succeeds. Daniel had understood, from the prophecies of Jeremiah, that the time for the close of the Babylonish captivity was near at hand: and he set himself to seek more particular instruction from God respecting it, in order that he might be able to take advantage of such circumstances as might occur for the benefit of his nation. "I set my face," says he, "unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: and I prayed unto the Lord my God."

And now behold the effect!

"While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and making my request to the LORD my God for his holy hill—while I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice. He instructed me and said to me, "Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding. As soon as you began to pray, an answer was given, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed, [Daniel 9:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 9.3-4); [Daniel 9:20-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 9.20-23)."

See what expedition was used, by God's special command, to answer while in the very act of prayer; and to let him know, that, at the very commencement of his suit, his prayer was heard!

More on this subject is unnecessary: yet less could scarcely have been spoken, if we would in any degree do justice to it.

***~~2. He shall prevail for ourselves—~~***

I mention this last, because it is, in reality, the greatest: for the prayers which are offered in behalf of others, prevail only for the obtaining of some temporal blessing—they cannot certainly procure for men the salvation of their souls: for, if they could, no creature would ever perish. When Stephen prayed, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge," it prevailed probably in behalf of Saul, and perhaps of some others: but it cannot be supposed that it succeeded in behalf of all.

But for a man's own self his prayer is sure to prevail. There is no limit to the benefits which he shall receive, provided only he asks according to the will of God.*He may not be answered in the particular way that he may desire*. The cup, for the removal of which the Lord Jesus Christ himself prayed, was not taken out of his hands. Nor was the thorn for the extraction of which Paul cried with such eager importunity removed: but both he and his divine Master were answered in a way more consonant with the purposes of Jehovah. But in some way, and that the best, prayer shall most assuredly be answered to all who cry to God in sincerity and truth, [Jeremiah 29:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 29.13). Whatever they ask in Christ's name, shall be given them, [John 14:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.13-14); [John 15:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.7); [John 16:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.23) and [1 John 3:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.22); 1 [John 5:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.14-15). Let them "open their mouth ever so wide, it shall be filled, [Psalm 81:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.10)." They may exhaust all the powers of language in their petitions, and may then extend their thoughts to the utmost limit of a finite conception; and they shall not only have all, but more than all, yes, "abundantly above all that they can ask or think, [Ephesians 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.20)."

The assertion in our text deserves the most attentive consideration on its own account; but more especially on account of,

***~~II. The insight which it gives us into truths of the greatest importance—~~***

***~~1. We here obtain an insight into the character of God—~~***

We think of God, for the most part, as a Being of infinite majesty, who, unless in matters of very extraordinary consequence, does not trouble himself with the concerns of men. Hence, if a person were to speak of having received answers to his prayers, he would be accounted wild, visionary, and presumptuous.

But let God be viewed as he is represented in the text: let him be viewed as noticing with the deepest interest the very least and basest of his children; as attending to their every cry, and treasuring up in his vials their every tear. "You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book! [Psalm 56:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 56.8)." Not so much as a "breathing" of theirs escapes his notice; or a desire, of which they themselves perhaps are scarcely conscious, [Psalm 145:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.18-19). [Lamentations 3:56](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 3.56). The highest archangel does not more engage his attention, than does a poor despised Lazarus.*God is as much concerned about every one of his redeemed people, as though there were only that one in the whole universe!* This is the true light in which to view his infinite condescension and grace; of which a mother's feelings towards her first-born child afford but a slender and very inadequate idea [Isaiah 49:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.15).

***~~2. We here obtain an insight into the Christian's state—~~***

In respect of external appearance, there is no difference between a child of God and any other person: but in reality, as they are viewed by God, they are widely dissimilar:

In the one God beholds his own image; in the other, he beholds the image of the wicked one.

On the one he looks with pleasure and delight; the other he views afar off, with utter disdain, [Psalm 138:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 138.6).

To the one his ears are open, to hear their every request [Psalm 34:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.15-16); but "the sacrifices of the other are an abomination to him [Proverbs 15:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 15.8)."

Look at Abraham, when interceding for Sodom: there you see the friend of God.

Look at those who, merely under the pressure of some calamity, cry and plead for help, while yet they have no love to God in their hearts. There you see the contrast; for God "laughs at their calamity, and mocks at their fear [Proverbs 1:24-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 1.24-28)."

And all this is but a prelude to that which will speedily be accomplished in them; when the one shall be called to his right hand, and be exalted to a throne of glory!

The other shall be placed to his left hand, and be cast into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone!

Ungodly men endeavor to persuade themselves that all this is nothing but a vain conceit: but the Jews, notwithstanding all their blindness, could see that this difference did exist: "We know" say they, "that God hears not sinners: but if any man is a worshiper of God, and do his will, him he hears, [John 9:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 9.31)." Do you then know it: for, whether you will believe it, or not, so it is: nor are light and darkness, Christ and Belial, Heaven and Hell, further asunder, than are the children of God, and the children of the wicked one! [2 Corinthians 6:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.14-16).

***~~3. We here obtain an insight into the use and excellency of the Gospel—~~***

It is the Gospel alone that can bring a man into this happy state. Nothing else can show him how to draw near to God with acceptance, or to obtain reconciliation with him. This exhibits to us a Savior—a Savior who bought us with his blood. This brings us into union with that Savior, so that we are made "one spirit with him, [1 Corinthians 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.17)," and are entitled to a participation of all that he himself possesses, "of the love with which the Father loves him! [John 17:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.23);" of "the joy with which his soul is filled! [John 17:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.13);" and "of the glory which the Father has given to him! [John 17:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.22)."

Here is the true secret of the difference of which we have before spoken. The believer is viewed as in Christ; as washed in his blood; as clothed in his righteousness; as altogether "one with him, even as the Father and Christ are one, [John 17:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.21)." This accounts for all which we have before mentioned of the believer's peculiar and exalted privileges.

Let me then entreat you, beloved, to embrace the Gospel without delay; seeing that through that alone you can have access to God, and obtain that fellowship with him which it is your privilege to enjoy.

***~~To CONCLUDE—~~***

Bear in mind to whom these privileges belong—they belong exclusively to "the righteous man." The ungodly and the hypocrite have no part in them. Seek then to attain the character of the righteous: seek it by faith in the Lord Jesus, "by whose obedience you shall be made righteous, [Romans 5:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.19)," and by whose all-powerful grace you shall "be renewed after the Divine image in righteousness and true holiness, [Ephesians 4:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.24)." Then all these blessings shall be yours! You shall be "a people near unto God, [Psalm 148:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 148.14);" yes, you shall "have power with God, and shall prevail, [Hosea 12:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 12.4)," in all your supplications: even for others you shall prevail to a great extent, but for yourselves you shall obtain all the blessings both of grace and glory.

***~~#2378~~***

***~~CONVERSION OF A SINNER A GREAT BENEFIT~~***

***~~[James 5:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.19-20)~~***

"My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins."

In the apostolic age, the power of working miracles was given to some; and was much coveted, not only on account of the benefit which it enabled its possessor to impart, but on account of the credit which it brought to him who exercised it, as being sent by God. That power has long since been withdrawn, it being no longer necessary for the support and credit of the Christian cause. Nor need we regret its discontinuance; since there is yet communicated to every true Christian a power of infinitely greater value; namely, a power to instruct and save the souls of men. We cannot any longer by the prayer of faith save the sick, and raise him up from the bed of sickness, and remove the judgments that have been inflicted on him on account of his sins, verse 14, 15; but by instructing a sinner, and turning him from the error of his sins, we can now, no less than in the apostolic age, save a soul from death, and cover a multitude of sins. The miraculous power was in the hands of few, even of "the elders of the Church;" but this spiritual power, as my text intimates, is common to all, and is to be exercised by all.

From hence we see,

***~~I. Our duty towards our erring brethren—~~***

***~~There are still, as formerly, many, who, while they profess to be Christians, do materially "err from the truth"—~~***

No one can read this epistle without seeing that very awful errors obtained in the Church, both in relation to faith and practice: and no one can know anything of the Christian world, and not know that *Christianity among them is little more than a name*.

The basic principles of the gospel, such as the way of salvation, as simple as it is, is very little understood. There is scarcely any one who is not expecting to be saved in whole, or in part, by some works of his own. The generality imagine that their repentance and reformation are to recommend them to God: and even those who acknowledge their obligations to the Lord Jesus Christ for what he has done and suffered for them—yet hope to obtain salvation in Him by their good works, or acceptance on account of their works through him. *The simple life of faith is but little known: and frequently but little experienced*, even where the necessity of it is acknowledged.

The same may be said of men's practice also. Look at the life and conduct of the whole Christian world, and say, what resemblance you see in it to the life of Christ. Christians are said to be "epistles of Christ, known and read of all men." But what more would you learn of the mind and will of Christ, from what you see in the Christian world, than from what you might find in the better sort of heathen?

In the Lord Jesus Christ there was an entire superiority to the world: but in his professed followers you see an entire subjection to it.

In the Lord Jesus Christ you find that "it was his food and drink to do the will of his heavenly Father:" but in his professed followers you will see no such effort, no such determination to serve and honor God.

Let all of you, who are here present, look at their own *principles*, and their own *practice*, and see whether they are founded altogether upon God's revealed will, and altogether conformed to the pattern set before them in the Scriptures. The more candidly these matters be inquired into, the more clearly will you see that the great mass of nominal Christians are "erring from the truth," and need to "be converted from the error of their ways!"

***~~Towards these nominal Christians our duty is to use all possible means for their conversion—~~***

We are not all called to take upon us the ministerial office: but we all in our respective circles would exert ourselves for the edification of those around us. No man is at liberty "to put his light under a bed, or under a bushel:" no man is at liberty to ask, "Am I my brother's keeper?" would any man, who would see a house on fire, be justified in saying, 'It is no concern of mine?' Or, if the inhabitants were burned to death through his unconcern, would there be a creature upon earth that would not execrate him for his inhumanity?

Much more therefore, if we see immortal souls "erring from the truth," and hastening to destruction, would we be inexcusable if we neglected to warn them of their danger, and to show them how their souls might be saved alive.

We should warn those who are living in a willful neglect of God.

We should declare to them their guilt and danger.

We would set before them what the Scriptures have spoken respecting "the death of the soul."

We should entreat them to "flee from the wrath to come."

In particular, we should, as far as our capacity admits of it, open to them "the truth as it is in Jesus."

We would make known to them the wonders of redeeming love.

We would set the Lord Jesus Christ before them in all his endearing qualities; and show them how "able, and willing, he is to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him."

We should encourage them to believe in him; and, by the holy violence of argument and entreaty, would "compel them" to accept his gracious invitations, and to sit down as guests at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

In a word, we should do our utmost to enlighten, convert, and save their souls!

That we may the more readily engage in this duty, let us consider,

***~~II. Our encouragement to perform it—~~***

We may doubtless find much of our labor to be in vain. But, if in any single instance we succeed:

***~~1. We shall "save a soul from death"—~~***

Unconverted sinners, whatever they may imagine, are hastening to death: for the "wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men;" and the soul that sins, it shall die. Let not any one imagine, that this death consists in a mere annihilation. No; the soul, as to its existence, shall never die: but it will endure a misery of which we can form no conception, a torment in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is called in Scripture "the second death."

From this however, if we are made the happy instruments of converting a soul to God, we deliver it. What a wonderful thought is this! to deliver a soul from "everlasting burnings!" If we labored throughout our whole lives, and succeeded but in one instance to accomplish our desire—then how richly would we be recompensed! What if the great mass of those whose welfare we had sought, had derided us as weak enthusiasts? the thought of saving one soul from everlasting perdition would compensate all the obloquy that ever could be cast upon us.

*The truth is, we can form no idea what it must be to spend eternity in weeping and wailing and gnashing our teeth in the regions of despair, and under the wrath of an offended God!* But, if we could form any conception of it, we would need no other inducement to labor day and night in endeavors to guide men into the way of truth, and to save their souls alive.

***~~2. We shall hide a multitude of sins—~~***

Who can ever count the sins of an unconverted soul? Yet shall they all be hidden, hidden from the sight of Almighty God, "out of the book of whose remembrance they shall be blotted," and from before whose face they shall pass away "as a morning cloud." Yes, God himself will "cast them behind his back into the very depths of the sea," and "will remember them against the sinner no more." Hear the declaration of God upon this subject: "The iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I reserve, [Jeremiah 50:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 50.20)."

Now consider this: Consider an immortal soul laden with iniquities more numerous and weighty than the sands upon the sea-shore; and liberated from its burden through your offices of love! Methinks, the most distant hope of conferring such a benefit is enough to turn you all into heralds and ambassadors of the Most High God.

Yet let me not be misunderstood. It is not to the office of public instructors that I would call you; for that would be undertaken by none but those who are called to it by God himself: but to the office of private instructors, I would invite you; and would urge you with all importunity to engage in it: for it is not of ministers that the Apostle speaks in my text, but of private Christians; every one of whom he encourages to engage in this labor of love, saying, "Let him know, whoever he be that converts a sinner from the error of his ways, let him know, that he saves a soul from death, and hides a multitude of sins."

***~~See then, beloved,~~***

***~~1. What is the true end of the ministry—~~***

The whole world is out of course: all are erring from the fold of Christ, and wandering like sheep that know not how or where to return. That they may not irremediably perish, God has appointed ministers, to go forth, as under shepherds, to search out the wandering sheep, and to bring them back to his fold. This is the one object of our lives: to show you how far you "have erred from the truth;" to convert you from the error of your ways; and thus eventually to save your souls.

In our execution of this office we perhaps appear to some to be uncharitable and harsh. But if we do believe that death, even the death of your immortal souls, will be the end of your wanderings, then does it not befit us "to lift up our voice like a trumpet, and to show to the house of Israel their sins" with all fidelity?

Suppose a person taking the soundings of a ship in full sail, were to suddenly find, that the ship were running upon rocks or shoals, and would speedily, if the helm were not instantly turned, be irremediably lost; would he not feel it his duty to apprise the pilot of his danger? or would the passengers, whose lives were in such imminent peril, be offended with him, if he spoke as one who believed what he said, and as one who had the safety of the crew at heart?

Methinks, if there were somewhat of vehemence in his words and manner, all would readily excuse it; and not excuse it only, but applaud it also, as the proper effect of fidelity and love.

Then consider us as placed in that situation by Almighty God. You are all embarked on board the vessel, and we are appointed by God to take the soundings: and we declare unto you, that unless your course be changed, you must inevitably and eternally perish. If you doubt it, take the line in your own hands, and examine the chart by which you are to steer. We do not wish you to take our word, but to see and judge for yourselves: and, if our testimony is true according to the written word, then be thankful for our labors; and, instead of being offended at our fidelity, adore your God, who has appointed us "to watch for your souls," and has connected our welfare with yours: for it is only by a faithful discharge of our duty to you that "we can save ourselves, or those who hear us! [1 Timothy 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 4.16)."

***~~2. What should be your view in attending on the ordinances of the Gospel—~~***

You should not come to be amused, but to be instructed and edified. You should come desirous of knowing wherein you have erred, and how you may get safely into the way of truth. Your minds should be open to conviction. You should be aware of the danger of self-deception. You should beg of God to instruct his ministers how to speak most to your edification; and should entreat him to accompany the word with power from on high, and to render it effectual for the salvation of your souls. You should bear in mind, that, "though Paul should plant, and Apollos water, it is God alone that can give the increase;" and you should judge of your profiting, not by the pleasure with which you heard, but by the insight which you have gained into the evils of your own heart, and the ability that has been imparted to rectify your errors.

As God in the appointment of ordinances seeks the conversion of your souls, so should you in attending on them, "receiving with meekness the engrafted word," and praying that, as it is able, so also it may be effectual, to save your souls alive, [James 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.21).

***~~3. What should be the one object of your whole lives—~~***

*What is there of any importance in life, compared with the salvation of the soul?*I do not hesitate to say, that the care of the soul is the "one thing needful." If there were no future state, men might go on in their own ways without much concern. But, when there is an eternity awaiting us—an eternity, either of happiness in Heaven, or of misery in Hell; when our destination to the one or other of these depends entirely on our conduct in this present life; and when no man knows that he has another day to live—I see not how any doubt can exist in the mind of a rational being, that *the care of his soul should infinitely outweigh all the concerns of time and sense*.

True it is, that when men act according to this truth, they are derided as enthusiasts: but there is no man who, in his deliberate judgment, does not see, that "the fear of the Lord is the very beginning of wisdom." Regard not then the scoffs of foolish and ungodly men; all of whom, if not in this life—yet in the next at least, will applaud your wisdom. As for the angels, they, though in the very presence of their God, will not be so occupied with the glories of Heaven, but they will have their joys augmented when they shall behold you turning into wisdom's ways.

I beg you then to be in earnest about the salvation of your souls. If God has appointed an order of men on purpose to promote your welfare, and has suspended their salvation on their fidelity to you, and has taught them to consider success in one single instance as a rich recompense for the labor of their whole lives, surely it does not befit you to be careless and indifferent. I beg you to awake to a sense of your condition. Think how great a work you have to do, and how short and uncertain is the time wherein you have to do it: and now, before it be too late, "turn, turn from your evil ways; for why will you die?"

***~~1 PETER~~***

***~~#2379~~***

***~~OFFICES OF THE HOLY TRINITY~~***

***~~[1 Peter 1:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.1-2)~~***

"Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance."

*As contemptible as Christians often appear in the eyes of men, they are of high estimation in the sight of God.* Many glorious descriptions are given of them in the inspired volume: but in no part of it have we more exalted views of them than in the words before us; where, at the same time that they are represented as treated by man with all manner of cruelties and indignities, they are spoken of as most dear to the three persons in the Godhead, having been:  
elected by God the Father,  
redeemed by the Lord Jesus, and  
sanctified by the operations of the Holy Spirit.

This is a great mystery—the union of the Sacred Three in the redemption and salvation of fallen man. But the consideration of this mystery is of peculiar importance; not only as establishing the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, but as showing the connection of that doctrine with every part of our salvation; which originates with God the Father, is carried on by God the Son, and is perfected by God the Holy Spirit.

Let us, under a deep sense of our own ignorance, and with a humble dependence upon God for his guidance and direction, proceed to a calm, dispassionate, and candid consideration of this all-important subject.

***~~I. The Father elects—~~***

***~~The doctrine of election is here, as in many other passages, plainly asserted—~~***

Christians are "elect, according to the foreknowledge of God." By "the foreknowledge of God" I understand, God's infallible discernment of future things, however contingent they may appear to us. That he possesses this perfection is unquestionable: for if he did not, how could he ever have inspired his prophets to foretell such distant and improbable events? It is not possible to read the life of our Lord, and to compare the predictions concerning him with the events by which they were fulfilled, and not to say, "Known unto God are all his works from the foundation of the world, [Acts 15:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 15.8)." Indeed a man who denies this truth must "think God to be even such a one as himself," ignorant of the future, and made wiser by the occurrences of every succeeding day; a supposition from which the mind revolts with utter abhorrence.

Considering then the foreknowledge of God as comprising everything relating to the salvation of man, *we are constrained to view all that relates to man's salvation as ordained of God*. For though we may easily distinguish in idea between foreknowledge and fore-ordination, we cannot separate them in fact; since if God foreknow everything, he foreknows it, not as probable, but as certain; and therefore *certain, because it has been fore-ordained by him "before the foundation of the world," and is "wrought by him in time according to the counsel of his own will,* [Ephesians 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.4); [Ephesians 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.11)."

Hence to God's electing love we refer all the grace and mercy that we have ever experienced; and thankfully acknowledge, that "by the grace of God we are what we are! [1 Corinthians 15:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.10);" and that, if ever we be saved at all, it will be, "not according to our works, but according to his purpose and grace which were given us in Christ Jesus before the world began! [2 Timothy 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.9)."

***~~The objections which are usually brought against this doctrine, by no means disprove its truth—~~***

Many affirm, that, if the doctrine of election be true, that of reprobation, of absolute reprobation, must be true also. In answer to this, I would say, that we know nothing, either of the one or of the other, but from the revelation which God has given us; and that, if that revelation affirms the one and denies the other, we must receive that which it affirms, and reject that which it denies. That it does deny the doctrine of absolute reprobation, I think is clear as the light itself. If when Almighty God swears by his own life and immortal perfections, that "he has no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he would turn from his wickedness and live;" and then founds on that oath this gracious invitation, "Turn, turn from your evil ways; for why will you die? [Ezekiel 33:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.11)." I am constrained to say, that the doctrine of absolute reprobation, that is, of God's forming any persons with an express determination to destroy them, irrespectively of any works of theirs, cannot be true. But must I therefore deny the doctrine of election, which the whole Scriptures uniformly assert, merely because I know not how to reconcile the two opinions? Surely not. My opinions are formed on Scripture, and not on the fallible deductions of human reason; and if I cannot reconcile the two, it is no reason that God cannot.*I cannot reconcile the existence of sin with the holiness of God: but do I therefore deny, or doubt, either the one or the other?* Certainly not; so neither do I doubt God's exercise of sovereign grace towards his elect, because my weak and fallible reason would be ready to connect with it an arbitrary decree against the non-elect. I am sure, that the Judge of all the earth will do right; and that, while all the saved will ascribe their salvation simply and solely to the grace of God, there will not be found one among those who perish, who will not confirm God's sentence of condemnation upon him, saying, "Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are your judgments! [Revelation 16:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 16.7)."

Another objection against this doctrine is: That the elect will be saved, though they never would strive at all; and the non-elect will perish, however earnestly they may strive.

But God has united the end with the means: and to attempt to separate them will be in vain. Who the elect are, we know not, until they themselves reveal it by the effects produced upon them: nor will it ever be known who the non-elect are, until the day of judgment shall reveal it. But this we know—and this we affirm for the comfort of all—that "every one who asks, receives; and every one that seeks, finds; and that to every one that knocks, shall the gate of Heaven be opened, [Matthew 7:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.7-8)." What can the most determined opposer of the doctrine of election say more than this, or wish for more than this?

Some will yet further urge, That, if this doctrine is true—then men may be saved without any regard to holiness. This objection is of the same kind with the former: and that there is no just ground for it, our text itself sufficiently declares: for we are "elect unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." They are elect, not to salvation only, but to obedience also; to the one as the means, and to the other as the end.

What is spoken respecting our being elect "to the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ," will lead me to show, that whom the Father has elected:

***~~II. Christ redeems—~~***

On the subject of obedience being an end to which we are elect, we shall speak under the next head: at present, we confine ourselves to the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.

***~~That the elect are sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ, is certain—~~***

Moses, when he confirmed the covenant which the Israelites entered into with their God, sprinkled both the altar and the people with the blood of the sacrifices, [Exodus 24:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 24.6); [Exodus 24:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 24.8); and in like manner we, when we embrace the covenant of grace, are sprinkled with the blood of our Great Sacrifice, which purges us from the guilt of all our former sins, and sanctifies us as a holy people unto the Lord: "We come to the blood of sprinkling, which speaks better things than the blood of Abel, [Hebrews 12:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.24)."

And here it is particularly to be noticed, that it is not only by the shedding of the Redeemer's blood that any are saved, but by the application of it to their souls! Millions "perish for whom Christ died 1 Corinthians 8:11;" but *no one ever perished, whose "heart had been sprinkled from an evil conscience*," and "purged from dead works to serve the living God, [Hebrews 9:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.14); [Hebrews 10:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.22)."

***~~To this they are elected, as to the necessary means of their acceptance with God—~~***

None, however elect by God the Father, could come to God, unless a sacrifice were provided for them. All are sinners: all need pardon for their multiplied iniquities: no man could make satisfaction for his own sins. One sacrifice was provided by God for the whole world, even the sacrifice of God's only-begotten Son. Through that, God determined from all eternity to accept them: and in due time he reveals it to them, as the way opened for their access to him. Thus they are brought to see Christ, as "the way, the truth, and the life:" and thus they receive "redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of all their sins."

We must not however imagine that God elects any in a way inconsistent with his own honor. He does not by a mere absolute decree forgive them: he does not so overlook the honor of his own law, or disregard the demands of his own truth and justice. On the contrary, he provides a Savior for them, through whose atoning blood they may be forgiven, and in whose obedience they may find a justifying righteousness. If he elected them simply to salvation without any regard to an atonement, he would exercise one attribute at the expense of all the rest: but in electing them to the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ, he provides for the honor of his broken law, and maintains in united and harmonious exercise the glory of all his perfections: he provides, that "Mercy and truth would meet together, and righteousness and peace would kiss each other, [Psalm 85:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 85.10)."

As Christ redeems whom the Father has elected, so those, whom Christ has redeemed:

***~~III. The Spirit sanctifies—~~***

It is in reality through the influence of the Holy Spirit that the souls of the elect are sprinkled with the blood of Christ: because it is He who reveals Christ unto them, and enables them to believe on him. But, besides this, "The Spirit sanctifies them to obedience":

***~~To this are the elect chosen, as to the means whereby their ultimate salvation shall be attained—~~***

It would be dishonorable to God if an unholy creature were admitted to a participation of his throne: nor, if we could suppose such a creature admitted into Heaven, could he be happy there; because he would lack all the dispositions which were necessary to qualify him for the enjoyment of that holy place. On this account God has ordained to sanctify his elect in body, soul, and spirit, and to "transform them into his own image in righteousness and true holiness."

***~~And this work he has committed to the Holy Spirit—~~***

The Spirit originally breathed upon the face of the waters, and reduced the chaotic mass to order and beauty. So does he move upon the believer's soul. Whatever is corrupt, he mortifies; whatever is lacking, he supplies. Above all, *the Spirit reveals the Savior to the soul, and thereby changes the soul progressively into the Savior's image*,[2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.18). This is precisely what Paul also has spoken in his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians: "We are bound to give thanks to God for you all, brethren, beloved, because God has chosen you to salvation (there is the end) through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." Here are the means to that end, even faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and his atoning blood; and the sanctifying operations of the Holy Spirit upon the soul, [2 Thessalonians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.13).

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. Of what infinite value are the souls of men!~~***

Everyone carries about him a treasure which God himself covets. The Father has given his only dear Son to redeem it: and Christ has shed his own blood to purchase it: and the Holy Spirit is ever striving with us, to make us surrender it up willingly to God. O that men would view their souls in this light, and bestow upon them the care which they so richly deserve!

***~~2. What encouragement has every man to seek after salvation!~~***

The doctrines of election, of faith in Christ, and of the influences of the Holy Spirit, are supposed by many to create despondency. But, if duly considered, they afford the best possible antidote to despair. Suppose a person to be bowed down under a sense of his own guilt and weakness, is it no comfort to him to reflect:  
that the Father may elect whoever he will;  
that the blood of Christ is sufficient to cleanse from guilt even of the deepest dye;  
and that the Holy Spirit can renew and sanctify a soul, however inveterate its corruptions are!

Let this then be the improvement made of these doctrines; and they will soon commend themselves by their cheering and transforming efficacy.

***~~#2380~~***

***~~REGENERATION CONSIDERED~~***

***~~[1 Peter 1:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.3-5)~~***

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in Heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time."

Among the many distinguishing characters of the true Christian, this is not the least remarkable, that*he can rejoice in the midst of the heaviest tribulations*. Others may be patient under them: but no man who is not born of God can attain this high state of feeling—to *glory*in them. The Christians to whom the Apostle wrote were in a state of very severe affliction, scattered over divers countries, where they had been driven by the violence of persecution. Yet, how did the Apostle address them? in terms of pity or condolence? No! but in terms of the sublimest congratulation. He thinks not of what man has done against them, but of what God has done for them; and bursts forth in this rapturous strain: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope!" The recollection of the mercy given to them by regeneration swallowed up all thought of their trials, and superseded, for a time, all mention of their sufferings.

The terms in which regeneration is here spoken of will lead us to consider it in,

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

***~~Regeneration is a spiritual and supernatural change of heart—~~***

All are agreed that we must be baptized with the Holy Spirit. All are agreed, that we must be made "partakers of a new and a divine nature, [2 Peter 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.4)," and become "new creatures in Christ Jesus, 2 Corinthians 5:17." In a word, all agree, that, in order to be children of God, we must be "begotten of God:" and that being admitted, I am indifferent as to the name by which it shall be called: call it a new birth, a new creation, a renewal in the spirit of the mind, or a conversion of soul to God; only let an radical change of heart and life be included in it, and (though one word may more strictly and appositely express it than another) we are satisfied. Suffice it to say, that "a new heart must be given to us, and a new spirit be put within us;" and that this change is essential to us, as children of God.

***~~It is this new birth that distinguishes the Lord's people from all the rest of the world—~~***

The natural man possesses nothing but what he brought into the world with him. His faculties may be of the first order, so far as they relate to earthly things: yet he is as blind as others in relation to heavenly things. In order to comprehend these, he must have a spiritual discernment, [1 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.14); which can only be given to him from above. This may be possessed by the poorest and most illiterate man, while it is withheld from the wise and prudent. In fact, God has so ordered it, that "what he has hidden from the wise and prudent, would be revealed unto babes, [Matthew 11:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.25-26);" and there are but "few of the wise and learned, in comparison," to whom this gift is imparted; for "God has chosen the weak and foolish, on purpose to confound the wise and mighty, [1 Corinthians 1:26-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.26-29)." Nor is this a mere dream: it is proved by the life and conduct of all who are born of God. They show that they have a view of God and of eternity, which others do not possess: and, in consequence of this view, they manifest a heavenliness, both of heart and life, which others cannot attain. Being born of God, they live no longer to themselves, but unto Him who begat them, and to Him who redeemed them with his precious blood!

But in the passage before us we are more particularly led to notice regeneration in,

***~~II. The causes of regeneration—~~***

***~~The great efficient cause of regeneration is God—~~***

Jehovah, in the Old Testament, is called "the God of Abraham:" but to us he is revealed under the more endearing title of the "God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," and our God and Father in him. In this relation he is considered as "begetting us again;" and forming us, as it were, altogether anew. This he does by the operation of his word upon the hearts and consciences of men, and by the Almighty power of his Spirit working effectually in them. Hence we are said to be "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which lives and abides forever, [1 Peter 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.23). [James 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.18)." In like manner we are said to be "born of the Spirit [John 3:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.5-6)." And this birth is not only distinguished from, but put in direct opposition to, the natural birth of man; for "to as many as receive Christ, to them he gives power to become the sons of God, even to those who believe on his name; who are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God, [John 1:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.12-13)."

Here, then, the efficient cause of our regeneration is distinctly marked: it is not effected by any power which is possessed by the man himself, or by others over him, or by any created being: it must be traced to God himself, to God alone, to God entirely, to God exclusively.

***~~The moving cause of regeneration is his "mercy"—~~***

Man never merited it; never asked it; never of himself desired it. God, who sees us when dead in trespasses and sins, is moved only by his own "mercy" towards us, to impart unto us this transcendent gift. He saw us, like new-born infants, "lying in our blood; and commanded us to live! [Ezekiel 16:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 16.6)." O! who can ever appreciate this blessing aright? Who can ever estimate the blessing of being "begotten of God," and "born of God?" To be begotten and born of an earthly monarch were nothing in comparison with it; nothing in respect of honor; nothing in respect of benefit. That we were created men, was grace; because we might have been of a lower order of beings, like beasts: but to be new-created, after that we were fallen, and by this new creation to be made sons of God, is not only "mercy," but such mercy as never was given to the angels that fell! No; it was reserved for us: and "abundant" mercy it was! The very angels in Heaven have not in this respect been so highly favored as we: for they can sing of grace only: whereas we, when we had abused and forfeited all the blessings of grace, had them all restored to us through the tender mercy of our God.

***~~The instrumental or procuring cause of regeneration was the Lord Jesus Christ—~~***

In general, the blessings of salvation are traced to the death of Christ, as their procuring cause. And such, no doubt, it was: for by it we are reconciled to God, and obtain the remission of all our sins. But here the blessing of regeneration is traced to the resurrection of Christ; and with great propriety; because, if "he was delivered to death for our offenses, he was raised again for our justification, [Romans 4:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.25)."

To enter into this aright, we would place ourselves in the situation of the immediate followers of our Lord. What comfort would we have derived from the death of our Divine Master? We might be told, indeed, that he offered himself as a sacrifice for our sins: but how would we know that sacrifice was accepted in our behalf? It was his resurrection alone that put that matter beyond a doubt: and therefore we find the Apostles everywhere insisting principally on this, [Acts 2:24-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.24-36); [Acts 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.15); [Acts 17:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.3); [Acts 17:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.18); [Acts 17:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.31), as proving, beyond all reasonable doubt, that he was indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world, [Romans 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.4).

Moreover, it is as a risen Savior that "he lives to make intercession for us, [Hebrews 7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.25);" and is enabled to send the Holy Spirit down upon us, for the commencing and perfecting of a work of grace within us, [Acts 2:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.33); [Acts 2:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.38-39). Hence Paul, speaking of the death of Christ as prevailing for our salvation—yet lays the greater stress upon his resurrection, [Romans 8:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.34); [Romans 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.10); and hence also, in order to attain higher eminence in the divine life, he desired to "know Christ in the power of his resurrection, [Philippians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.10)." So that our regeneration may well be ascribed to the resurrection of Christ, not only on account of its proving his death to have been available for us, but as through it he is empowered to send down the Holy Spirit upon our souls.

We must, however, proceed yet further to trace this work in,

***~~III. The effects of regeneration—~~***

Of its sanctifying effects I have spoken under the first head. But we must on no account omit to notice those great *benefits*which it confers,

***~~1. In entitling us to Heaven—~~***

Repeatedly does Paul mark the indissoluble connection which God has established between our sonship and our inheritance: "If sons, then heirs—heirs of God through Christ, and heirs of God with Christ, [Romans 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.17). [Galatians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.7)." Now, the inheritance to which God has begotten us is nothing less than all the glory of Heaven; an inheritance:  
"not corruptible," as earthly treasures, "which moth and rust will corrupt;"  
"not defiled," like the earthly Canaan, by wicked inhabitants, (for "into Heaven nothing enters that can defile, [Revelation 21:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.27);")  
"not fading," by use, or age, or enjoyment, like the pleasures of sense.

No, it is an inheritance worthy of God to give to his beloved children, even that inheritance which Christ himself, as our Forerunner, our Head, and Representative, already occupies. "To a living hope of this" are we begotten, while yet we are in this valley of tears; and to the full possession of it, as soon as we go hence.

***~~2. In securing to us the possession of it—~~***

In two ways is this inheritance secured to us: "it is reserved by God for us; and we are kept by God for it;" so that neither shall it be taken from us by any enemy; nor shall we be allowed to come short of it through our own weakness. This is what God promised by his prophet of old: "I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me, [Jeremiah 32:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 32.40)." O inestimable gift! This security is the crown of all. What would regeneration be without it? What would it be to be made sons of God, and heirs of Heaven, if we were left to ourselves, to engage our great adversary in our own strength? Truly there is not one of us, however elevated he may at this moment be, who would not, in a very short space of time, if left to himself, become a child of Satan, and an heir of Hell!

But the power of God! what shall withstand that? or who shall fail, that has that exerted for him? All that is required of us is, to "have faith in God, [Mark 11:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 11.22). [John 14:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.1)." If only our faith be as a grain of mustard-seed, there is nothing that we shall not be able to effect, [Matthew 17:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 17.20). But "Christ has prayed for us, that our faith may not fail; and therefore, though Satan desires to have us, that he may sift us as wheat," yet he shall not finally prevail against us, [Luke 22:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.31-32); but "shall be bruised under our feet, [Romans 16:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.20)," even as he was under the feet of our triumphant Savior: for "because he, our Almighty Savior, lives, we shall live also, [John 14:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.19)." Like persons in an impregnable fortress, we may defy all the powers of darkness, and smile at all the confederacies both of earth and Hell.

***~~Observe then, beloved,~~***

***~~1. How happy are the saints, the sons of God—~~***

If we consider only the "hope," "the living hope," to which they are begotten, methinks they are by far the happiest of all mankind. But, if we take a view of the inheritance itself, the wonderful inheritance to which they are begotten—and, above all, the security which they possess for the ultimate enjoyment of it—what shall I say? Are they not happy? Or can they be placed in any circumstances whatever (sin only excepted) wherein they are not proper objects of envy to the whole creation? Be it granted, that they are as much oppressed as ever saints were, and as destitute of all earthly comfort; still I will congratulate them from my inmost soul, and bid them exclaim with joy and gratitude, "Blessed be God, who has begotten us again!"

***~~2. How pitiable is the condition of the unregenerate—~~***

You, alas! have no part or lot in the felicity of God's children. *Never having been begotten of him, you have no relation to him, nor any title to his inheritance!* Ah! think, then, whose children you are! [John 8:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.44), and with whom you must take your everlasting portion! [Matthew 25:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.41). I tremble to announce such awful tidings. But I thank God that yet you may become new creatures: for, as all the saints once were what you now are, so may you become what they are, [Galatians 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.12). Yes, the word, which is God's great instrument—yet sounds in your ears: and it is as powerful as ever, to convert souls to him, [Hebrews 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.12). Only receive it into your hearts by faith; and it shall "turn you," as it has unnumbered millions of your fellow-creatures, "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, [Acts 26:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.18)." Only believe in Christ, and you shall instantly become sons of God, [John 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.12) with [Galatians 3:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.26), and be enabled to look up to Heaven as your everlasting inheritance.

My dear brethren, "make not light of" this great salvation. Do but think how "ready it is to be revealed," and how certainly it shall be attained by all who believe in Christ. May God now pour out his Holy Spirit upon you all, that not one of you may "receive this grace of God in vain!"

***~~#2381~~***

***~~THE END OF AFFLICTION~~***

***~~[1 Peter 1:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.6-7)~~***

"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."

*The enlightening and converting of souls are the first objects of a minister's attention: nevertheless, the comforting of God's people is also an essential part of his duty.* This was the special direction which God gave to the prophet of old, [Isaiah 42:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 42.1); it is a conformity to the Divine Exemplar, [2 Corinthians 7:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.6); it is the fruit of the comforts they themselves receive, [2 Thessalonians 1:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 1.3-4)." *Peter is a striking pattern of a sympathizing and affectionate pastor*. He writes to the Christians who were scattered through divers countries; and begins with setting before them the richest topics of consolation, verse 3-5. He shows them the blessed end for which their present troubles are allowed to come upon them—

***~~I. The state and condition of God's people—~~***

Believers have at all times within themselves a ground of joy: yet they are also frequently oppressed with deep and pungent sorrow. They experience a peculiar and united exercise of these opposite affections.

***~~They "greatly rejoice" in the mercy which has been given unto them—~~***

They have been begotten of God to a living hope of a glorious inheritance: they see that inheritance reserved for them, and themselves kept for it. This cannot but be matter of exceeding joy to them at all times.

***~~But they are at the same time encompassed with manifold trials—~~***

They are hated, reviled, and persecuted by the world,  
they are assailed with "the fiery darts of the devil,"  
they are harassed with innumerable corruptions in their own hearts.

***~~Through these trials they are sometimes "in great heaviness"—~~***

Grace does not destroy, but only moderates our natural feelings. Christians therefore may be deeply oppressed with grief: not that God will allow them to continue always in heaviness. Nevertheless he permits them to be in this state occasionally, and "for a season."

***~~There is "a necessity" that they should undergo trials of this kind—~~***

God could save them without leaving them to endure any trial; but he "perfected his own Son by sufferings:" he has ordained that the members shall in this respect be conformed to their Head, [Zechariah 13:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 13.9).

Their trials, however afflictive at the time, are permitted for their good.

***~~II. The end for which they are allowed to be in that state—~~***

***~~Trials, of whatever kind they be, are justly called "trials of our faith"—~~***

No man can exercise the grace of patience, or of contentment, unless he is in a situation that may give rise to impatience or discontent: nor can faith be known to exist in the heart, unless there be some circumstances that give scope for the manifestation of it; but trials, especially such as produce much grief, can be surmounted only by strong faith. Hence God himself speaks as though he discovered Abraham's grace by means of the difficulties into which he was brought, [Genesis 22:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 22.12).

***~~In this view they are "much more precious than the trial of gold"—~~***

Gold, though it stand the trial of the fire, will perish at last; but faith, in its effects at least, will endure forever. The value and the brightness given to gold by the furnace are not so estimable, as the purity and brightness which our faith derives from affliction.

***~~Their real worth will not be discerned until the day of judgment—~~***

They will have a different aspect in "the day of Christ's appearing" from what they have now. The benefit resulting from them will be then fully revealed.

***~~They will then "be found to the praise and honor of those who endured them"—~~***

Everything we have done or suffered for Christ will be brought to light: a reward proportioned to our faithfulness will then be given us. Great sufferings will outcome in "an eternal weight of glory".

***~~They will be declared also to the praise and honor of Christ himself—~~***

Christ is "the author and finisher of our faith:" he will have the glory of carrying his people through their trials. Thus they will outcome in the good of the sufferers, and the glory of Christ.

This is the end for which God permits his people to endure them.

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How little cause have any persons to question their interest in God's favor on account of their trials, or their grief under them!~~***

Satan takes advantage of the afflictions of the saints to impress their minds with desponding thoughts: their natural turn of mind, too, sometimes favors such impressions. Even bodily disorder also may concur to deject their souls. But the being in heaviness through trials is no just ground of doubting our acceptance with God. The persons of whom the Apostle speaks in the text, were most undoubtedly in a converted state. They were "begotten again," had "a living hope," "believed in Christ," "loved him," "rejoiced in him with joy unspeakable," and had "received the salvation of their souls," verse 3, 8, 9. Let not any tempted soul then be desponding or dejected, [Isaiah 40:27-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.27-31).

***~~2. What abundant reason have we to be reconciled to afflictions!~~***

Afflictions are trying to our frail nature, but they are beneficial to our souls, [Hebrews 12:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.11). We shall before long see the necessity and benefit of each of our sorrows. The praise and honor in which they will outcome will make amends for all. Let us then even now account them "precious, [James 1:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.2-3);" *let us consider how light they are, when compared with the glory of Heaven*,[Romans 8:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.18); let us only be concerned to possess our souls in patience, [James 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.4).

***~~#2382~~***

***~~THE CHRISTIAN'S HAPPINESS~~***

***~~[1 Peter 1:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.8-9)~~***

"Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls."

The world often wonders that Christians do not conform to the vices of the age, [1 Peter 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.4); and are yet more surprised that any would be willing to suffer for the sake of their beliefs. But *every Christian is actuated by a principle of love to Christ*; which principle even gathers strength from the opposition it meets with. The Apostle is writing to those who were in heaviness through manifold trials. He declares, however, that their trials were promoting their eternal good; and that they were supported under them by their attachment to their adorable Redeemer.

In his words we may see,

***~~I. The state of true Christians—~~***

Christians cannot be distinguished better by anything, than by their regard to their Divine Master:

***~~1. They love Christ—~~***

Once, like the ungodly around them, they were enemies to Christ and his cross, [Philippians 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.19); they "saw no beauty in him, for which he was to be desired, [Isaiah 53:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.2)." But now he is truly precious to their souls, [1 Peter 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.7); and they claim him as their best friend and portion, [Song of Solomon 5:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 5.16). This is the character of every true Christian, [Ephesians 6:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.24); If any answer not to this character, they are, and must be, accursed, [1 Corinthians 16:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 16.22).

***~~2. They rejoice in Christ—~~***

They have a good hope, if not a full assurance, of a saving interest in him. They have access to him in their secret duties. They receive strengthening and refreshing communications from him. They rejoice in him, as their faithful and almighty Friend, [Philippians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.4). Their joy in him is "incapable of being fully declared." It is a "glorified" joy, such as the saints in Heaven possess. Every Christian indeed does not experience the same measure of joy; nor is any one at all times alike joyful: but no one is a Christian, who does not esteem the light of the Redeemer's countenance above every other good, [Psalm 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 4.6); [Psalm 73:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.25).

That their felicity may be more generally experienced, we proceed to state,

***~~II. The means by which they attain it—~~***

Many suppose, that if they could have a personal interview with Christ, such as Paul was favored with, they would love him, and rejoice in him. But a sight of him with the bodily eyes never in any instance produced this effect. Many who even heard his discourses, and beheld his miracles, were among his bitterest enemies. The Christians to whom Peter wrote had never seen Christ. The Apostle twice mentions this circumstance, to show that their regard for him did not arise from any personal acquaintance with him. Faith is the only means whereby we are brought to this love and joy: as it is said, "in whom believing, you rejoice."*It is only by faith that we can behold the excellency of Christ!* By faith alone that we can apply his merits to ourselves: by faith alone that we can receive his gracious communications, [Ephesians 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.17). Repentance will lead to this state; and obedience spring from it: but it is faith alone that will prevail to bring us into it, [Romans 15:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 15.13).

To increase our ardor in pressing forward to this state, let us consider,

***~~III. The blessedness of those who have attained it—~~***

*The salvation of the soul is the great "end of our faith."*Present comforts are desirable; but eternal happiness is that which the Christian has principally in view. It is to this that he looks forward, under his first convictions. This is the end for which he cheerfully endures all his privations and conflicts. In every possible state he has an eye to this, as the consummation of all his hopes and desires. This blessed object is already attained by all true Christians: they do not wait for it until they arrive in Heaven; their full reward indeed is reserved for another world. But believers have the foretastes of Heaven already communicated to them; yes, *their love to Christ, and their joy in him, are a pledge of their eternal inheritance*; they now, in a way of anticipation and actual enjoyment, "receive the end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls."

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. What a rational character is the Christian!~~***

He is thought an enthusiast for loving and rejoicing in Christ. Now we are willing to meet our adversaries on this ground, and to submit our opinions to this test. *If to admire supreme excellence, to love infinite amiableness, and to rejoice in unbounded goodness, is a rational employment*; yes, if the glorified saints and angels be rational, then the Christian is a rational character; and the more so, in proportion as he loves and rejoices in Christ: and their adversaries are most irrational, in that they can love and rejoice in the things of time and sense, and yet feel no love to, nor any joy in, our adorable Lord and Savior. Let those who are now despised as enthusiasts, think who will be accounted rational in the day of judgment.

***~~2. How clearly may we know whether we are real Christians or not!~~***

There are certainly different degrees of faith, love, and joy; but every true Christian experiences them in some measure. This is decided by an authority that cannot be doubted, [Philippians 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.3). Let us then examine what is the supreme object of our affections, and chief source of our joys. Nor let us ever conclude well of our state, unless we can adopt from our hearts the language of Paul, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord! [Philippians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.8)."

***~~#2383~~***

***~~THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PROPHECIES~~***

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

"Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the *sufferings*of Christ and the *glories*that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from Heaven. Even angels long to look into these things."

The same "salvation" that is made known to us, was revealed from the beginning. It was gradually unfolded to the world by many succeeding prophets. It is indeed exhibited as with meridian splendor in the New Testament. Yet by comparing the predictions of the prophets with the writings of the Apostles, we attain at once the fullest evidence of its divine original, and the deepest insight into its mysterious doctrines.

The truth of this observation will appear, while we consider,

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

Though many things contained in them related only to the times wherein they were written—yet much of them undoubtedly relates to future and distant periods.

***~~The grand scope of them in the general, is "the grace that would come unto us"—~~***

The Gospel is called "grace," because it is the highest expression of God's kindness towards our guilty world. It declares the wonderful provision which he has made for our recovery, and calls us to receive his blessings as a free unmerited gift. It represents every part of our salvation as the effect of his grace, and requires us now, as well as hereafter, to give him all the glory of it.

***~~More particularly, Christ is the sum and substance of the prophecies—~~***

God himself tells us that "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy, [Revelation 19:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 19.10) and [John 5:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.39);" the prophets "testified plainly of the sufferings of Christ." So minutely did they describe the smallest and most improbable circumstances of his death, that their writings appear rather like a narration than a prophecy. See [Psalm 22:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 22.8); [Psalm 22:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 22.16); [Psalm 22:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 22.18); [Psalm 69:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 69.21) and Isaiah 53; nor did they speak less accurately respecting "his glory that would follow." Every step of his exaltation, from his resurrection to his future coming to judge the world, is distinctly marked, [Psalm 68:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 68.18); [Psalm 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.6); and the triumph of his Gospel over the benighted Gentiles is proclaimed with confidence and exultation, [Psalm 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.8). Compare [Romans 15:9-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 15.9-12).

As in this light the prophecies deserve the deepest attention, so do they also on account of,

***~~II. The importance of the prophecies—~~***

The words before us mark the importance of the prophecies in a variety of views:

***~~1. The prophecies were dictated by "the Spirit of Christ"—~~***

The Holy Spirit was the agent whom Christ employed from the beginning. Compare [1 Peter 3:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.18-20); through him did Christ inspire the prophets, and enlighten the world, [2 Peter 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.21). Thus were all the prophecies clearly of divine original; and can anything more strongly mark their value and importance?

***~~2. The prophets themselves "inquired and searched diligently" into their meaning—~~***

The inspired men did not understand the precise import of their own prophecies. They only knew that they "ministered to the Church in distant ages;" but they studied the word, and sometimes with good effect, to gain an insight into the intentions and purposes of God, [Daniel 9:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 9.2). And if they judged their predictions so important while they were involved in obscurity, shall they be less valuable to us who have seen their accomplishment?

***~~3. The Apostles, in declaring the accomplishments of the prophecies, received miraculous testimonies from the Holy Spirit—~~***

They, "who first preached the Gospel, reported those things as done, which the prophets had beforehand testified" as to be done in due time; and their word was accompanied "with the Holy Spirit sent down from Heaven, [Hebrews 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.4)." Nor was this divine seal ever more immediately set to their ministrations than when they expressly referred to the prophecies as fulfilled in Jesus, [Acts 10:43-44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.43-44). Nothing surely could put a greater honor on the prophecies than this.

***~~4. The very Angels "desire to look into the prophecies"—~~***

The angelic figures over the ark were formed looking down upon it, [Exodus 25:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 25.20). This intimated the interest they feel in the work of redemption. They are indeed made wiser by the revelation given to the Church, [Ephesians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.10). Though they dwell in the presence of God, they desire to know more of this mystery. Though they have no personal interest in it, they long to comprehend it. Can we then, whose interest in it is so great, have low thoughts of any part of those Scriptures which exhibit and illustrate it?

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. What a mercy is it to live under the full light of the Gospel!~~***

*Those things which the patriarchs saw only in types and prophecies, we are privileged to enjoy in their substance and accomplishment.* Well therefore does Christ say to us, "Blessed are your eyes, blessed are your ears;" but if our light be greater than theirs, our obligations to follow it are proportionably increased; and if we neglect to improve it, surely both prophets and angels will appear against us to condemn us.

***~~2. In searching the Scriptures we would attend particularly to what is said of Christ—~~***

*Many read the Scriptures without ever discovering the fullness and excellency of Christ;*but as "they testify of him," so we are most concerned in what relates to him. Let us then fix our eyes diligently on that ark of God; let us treasure up in our minds whatever is spoken of "his sufferings and glory;" and, "mixing faith with what we read," let us seek to be made wise unto salvation.

***~~#2384~~***

***~~THE ANGELS INTERESTED ABOUT THE GOSPEL~~***

***~~[1 Peter 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.12)~~***

"Even angels long to look into these things!"

The Gospel comes recommended to us by a great variety of most important considerations. It occupied the mind of God from all eternity. From the beginning of the world it has been revealed with gradually increasing light and evidence. When the period arrived for its full promulgation, it was opened by the Lord of life himself, and was spread with incredible effect by a few poor fishermen, whom he chose and qualified to proclaim it. The Holy Spirit also bore testimony to it by unnumbered miracles, that were wrought expressly in confirmation of it. But there is one circumstance, which is rarely adverted to, which yet would exceedingly endear the Gospel to us; namely, that the holy angels are greatly interested in it, and that they are daily studying to comprehend it. This is affirmed by Peter in the words before us: for the elucidation of which we shall point out,

***~~I. The subjects of their inquiry—~~***

The two preceding, verses inform us, that the "salvation" of man, and "the grace that is brought unto us" for the securing of that salvation, are objects of their continual regard. More particularly they inquire into these things,

***~~1. As foretold by prophets—~~***

Every minute circumstance relative to the Gospel has been foretold by one or other of the prophets; insomuch, that, if we understood perfectly every part of the prophetic writings, we might extract from them as complete an account of the person, work, and offices of Christ, and of the establishment of his kingdom upon earth, as from the New Testament itself. But the prophets did not know the full extent of their own prophecies. They knew that they spoke by a divine impulse; but the precise import of what they spoke, they knew not. As the wicked Caiaphas, intending to stimulate the Jewish council to put Jesus to death, delivered unwittingly a prophecy that Jesus would die for the whole world, [John 11:49-52](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.49-52); so the pious prophets frequently delivered their opinions in language, which was dictated by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of proclaiming mysteries which they themselves understood not. Hence they "inquired and searched diligently" into the meaning of their own prophecies, verse 10, 11.

The angels, in like manner, are desirous of investigating these deep subjects. To intimate the concern which they take in these things, there was a very striking emblem of it in the Jewish temple. In the holy of holies was the ark: on that was placed the mercy-seat: and over that were two cherubim overshadowing it with their wings.

The ark (in which the tables of the law were kept) was a type of Christ, in whose heart the law was; and by whom it was fulfilled for us; and through whose obedience to it God exercises mercy towards us. This exhibited the substance of the Gospel.

Now the cherubim were formed somewhat in an inclined posture, looking down upon the ark, [Exodus 25:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 25.20); and this was ordered of God on purpose to denote the interest which angels take in this deep mystery, and the desire which they have to comprehend it: and it is to this very thing that Peter alludes in the words of our text.

***~~2. As executed by Christ—~~***

"The sufferings of Christ, and the glory that would follow," were fully declared before he became incarnate. The angels therefore were prepared for that stupendous series of events which in the fullness of time began to be accomplished: and, no doubt, they waited for them with devout and earnest expectation. Accordingly, the very instant that they saw him brought into the world, they carried the glad tidings to the shepherds, and informed them of the place of his nativity. From that moment, and especially in the most important scenes of his life, they watched him, not only as anxious spectators, but as agents employed by their Creator to minister to his necessities, or to attest his triumphs. After his temptations in the wilderness, and his conflicts in the garden, they gladly interposed their friendly offices to comfort and support him.

Though we are not expressly told that they were present at his crucifixion, we can have no doubt but that they attended on him at that awful period with more than ordinary solicitude. Were they capable of sorrow, methinks, their eyes would on that occasion be as a fountain of tears; and they would beat their bosoms with grief and anguish. But with what joy did they roll away the stone from his sepulcher, in order that his re-animated body might arise! [Matthew 28:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 28.2-4).

How happy were they to satisfy the inquiry of the women respecting the truth of his resurrection, and the accomplishment of his own predictions! At his ascension, too, they comforted his astonished followers, by announcing to them his intended return in the clouds of Heaven at the last day.

Shall we say that in these things they were mere servants and messengers, who felt no interest in the events themselves? We know the contrary: for at his birth a whole multitude of the heavenly hosts burst forth into that rapturous hymn, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men!"

***~~3. As enjoyed by the Church—~~***

It is not in a speculative view merely that they contemplate the great work of redemption: they consider it as "the grace that is brought unto us:" and in that view their benevolent hearts are most deeply affected with it. Hence, as well as from a sense of duty to their God, arose that affectionate solicitude which they expressed on all the occasions above referred to. Wherever the glad tidings are carried, they hasten to mark the effects produced by them: and if they behold a sinner impressed by them with humble penitence and contrition, not even the presence of their God, nor all the glory of Heaven, will keep them from rejoicing on his account. *They acquire as it were, new joy from every triumph that the Redeemer gains*, and from every benefit that man receives. *From the moment of a sinner's return to God, they watch over him with the tenderest care*. They encamp around him, and minister unto him. Little do we think how much we are indebted to their friendly aid; from how many snares they deliver us; in how many conflicts they support us; and with what transport they bear our triumphant spirits into the world of bliss.

As once they waited with impatience to see the prophecies accomplished, and the work of redemption executed in the person of Christ; so do they now wait with ardent desire to see the consummation of the Church's happiness, and the completion of the Redeemer's glory. At that great and solemn day will whole myriads of them attend to perform their last kind offices to God's elect; to assemble them in one collective body; and to unite with them in ascribing everlasting praises to God and to the Lamb. They cannot indeed say, "He has loved us and washed us!" but they will most heartily join in singing, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain!"

Their solicitude about things that relate to us, however strange it may appear at first sight, will not be thought strange, if we consider,

***~~II. The reasons of it—~~***

If we were unable to assign any reasons for their conduct, we might be well assured that their actions were regulated by wisdom and prudence.

But it is not difficult to account for their concern respecting these things: they look into them, not to gratify a vain curiosity, but,

***~~1. Because of the glory of God displayed in them—~~***

The angels have been blessed with many bright discoveries of the Divine glory, both in the works of *creation*and of *providence*. But these have all been eclipsed by the brighter displays of it in the works of *redemption*. Everything in the universe bespeaks the wisdom, the power, and the goodness of God: and the punishment inflicted on the fallen angels declares his justice and holiness. But the plan of salvation revealed in the Gospel is represented as being eminently, and beyond all comparison, "the wisdom of God, and the power of God."

As terrible as the justice of God appears in the miseries of the damned, it appears incomparably more tremendous in the sufferings of the Son of God, which were inflicted on him for our sins, and which were indispensably necessary to satisfy its inexorable demands.

But what shall we say of mercy? There was not a single trace of that to be found in the whole universe. The angels, after seeing the judgments executed on the apostate spirits, could have no idea that mercy could be exercised towards the guilty. But in the Gospel it shines forth as with meridian splendor; and all the other perfections of the Deity unite and harmonize with it.

Can we wonder then, that when they have a prospect of beholding "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," they would look into that looking-glass which reflects it? Can we wonder that they would examine with unwearied attention the prophecies that relate to Christ, the various incidents of his life and death, and the numberless benefits that he confers on all his followers? This alone was ample reason for all the care and diligence they can possibly exert.

***~~2. Because of the benefit accruing to themselves from the contemplation of them—~~***

As wise as those bright intelligences are, we have no doubt but that they are made wiser by their progressive discoveries of the truth of God. The revealing of the Gospel unto man is one way which God has adopted for the further illumination of the heavenly hosts; he makes known his manifold wisdom to the Church, in order that by the Church it may be exhibited before the eyes of angels and archangels, [Ephesians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.10). We have no reason to think that they have any revelations made to them, except through the medium of the Church: and consequently, if they would grow in knowledge, they must search, as it were, the sacred oracles, and "draw their water out of our wells of salvation."

But by their contemplation of the Gospel they are made happier too, as well as wiser. *For, in what does their happiness consist? Is it not derived principally from the knowledge of God, and their admiration of all his glorious perfections?*But it has been before shown, that their views of the Divine glory are rendered incomparably more clear and full by the representations given of it in the Gospel: consequently, their admiration of God must continually increase, and their delight in him be proportionably enlarged.

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How unfounded is men's contempt of the Gospel!~~***

The Gospel ever has been despised by proud self-sufficient men, and ever will be, as long as such men continue upon earth. It will ever appear "foolishness to the natural man." It is still loaded with reproach, and stigmatized with opprobrious names; and he must be "a stranger indeed in our Jerusalem," who has not known and witnessed this humiliating fact.

But what do these scoffers think of themselves? Are they wiser or better than the angels? Do they imagine the angels so weak as to admire and search into things which are unworthy the notice of a sensible man? Alas! these proud despisers of God and of godly men evince to the world, that they themselves are the greatest objects of pity and compassion. We do not, however, say to them as Paul did to the obstinate and obdurate Jews, "Behold, you despisers, and wonder, and perish, [Acts 13:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.41);" but rather, *Behold, and wonder, and adore!*

***~~2. How criminal is their neglect of the Gospel!~~***

Though the angels are in some measure interested in the Gospel—yet their concern with it is not to be compared with ours. *They*would have been happy, though no Savior had come into the world; but where would *we*have been? what would have become of us? Christ took not on him their nature: he shed not his blood for them; it was for *us*he become a man: for us he died upon the cross. What guilt then do we contract in slighting all his overtures of mercy! Surely the angels will rise up in judgment against us, and condemn us, if we are indifferent to the salvation he has so dearly purchased, and so freely offered.

***~~3. How great a blessing it is to be well instructed in the Gospel!~~***

We do not wish to depreciate human knowledge; but we do not hesitate to affirm, that all other knowledge, however deep, extensive, or valuable it may be—is no better than dung and dross in comparison with the Gospel, [Philippians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.8). All other knowledge shall vanish away; but this shall endure forever. Angels account all other things beneath their notice: but they never think they can pay too much attention to this.

Know then, that if your eyes are opened to behold aright the groat mystery of redemption, you have the most valuable gift that God himself can bestow! You have that which will bring salvation to your soul. If you have but moderately clear views of the Gospel, you are in that respect greater and more highly-favored than all the prophets; not excepting even John himself, who was more then a prophet, and had the distinguished honor of pointing out to men "the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world." Whatever then God has bestowed upon you, value this above all: whatever he has withheld from you, be satisfied with this. Whatever you do, or whatever you neglect, be sure to cultivate this. Resemble the angels in "looking into these things;" and you shall resemble them in holiness, and be with them in glory!

***~~#2385~~***

***~~DIRECTIONS HOW TO SEEK HEAVEN WITH SUCCESS~~***

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

"Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed."

The truths of God deserve our attention on account of their own excellence; but they are principally to be valued for the effects they produce on our lives. *The Apostles never rest satisfied with stating a mere system of doctrines, they invariably proceed to make a practical application of them to the soul and life.* Peter had briefly opened the blessed state of true believers. He had represented them as begotten to a glorious inheritance, of which their joy in Christ was a pledge, and to which, through their present trials, they would be advanced. He then urged the near approach of that glory, as a reason for exerting themselves more diligently in their Christian calling—"Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed."

The words of the text lead us to consider,

***~~I. The great object of a Christian's pursuit—~~***

There are in Scripture many beautiful descriptions of Heaven, but none more interesting than that contained in the words before us.

***~~The day of judgment is here called "the revelation of Jesus Christ"—~~***

Jesus Christ was revealed in the first promise that was made to man, [Genesis 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.15). He was also exhibited in the sacrifices which Abel offered, [Hebrews 11:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.4); [Hebrews 12:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.24). In successive ages he was made known in clearer prophecies, [Genesis 22:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 22.18) and [Isaiah 53:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.4-5); [Isaiah 53:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.11), and typified by various ordinances of the Jewish ritual. Compare [Exodus 12:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 12.5) with [1 Peter 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.19).

In the process of time he was personally "manifested in human flesh," and showed himself to be the Son of God by most irrefragable proofs, [Acts 2:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.22). [Romans 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.4). In the preaching of his Gospel he was yet more fully revealed. The glory of God as shining in his face is most transcendently displayed, [2 Corinthians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.6); still however "we see him as yet only through a looking-glass darkly, [1 Corinthians 13:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.12)." But in the last day he will appear in all his majesty and glory, [Matthew 25:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.31); he will "be revealed from Heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8." His enemies, no less than his friends, will then see him to be "King of kings, and Lord of lords."

***~~In that day, "grace will be brought unto us"—~~***

Grace and glory are sometimes used as synonymous terms in Scripture, [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.18), compared with the text. Indeed, grace is glory begun, and glory is grace consummated. [Psalm 84:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 84.11), "The LORD will give grace and glory." The spiritual blessings which God bestows, appear now to be the gifts of grace [Ephesians 2:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.7-8)!  
How much more shall we acknowledge the glories of Heaven to be so!  
How shall we marvel at the *goodness*of God in all his dealings towards us!  
How shall we adore his *wisdom*, even in the darkest of his dispensations.  
How shall we stand amazed that we were *saved*, while so many others were lost!

Surely, "when the top-stone is brought forth, we shall cry, Grace, grace, unto it! [Zechariah 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.7)." All this felicity "shall be brought unto us" openly, and in rich abundance.

Now, the grace imparted to us is small, though "sufficient for us;" and the consolations given unto us, are known only to ourselves. But in that day the kingdom will be given us in the presence of the whole universe, [Matthew 25:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.32); [Matthew 25:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.34); and our happiness shall be commensurate with our capacities and desires. What we partake of now, we obtain by diligent pursuit. What we receive then, shall be "brought unto us" freely by the hand of Jesus himself.

In the meantime it befits us to seek it with all earnestness.

***~~II. In what manner we ought to seek it—~~***

The directions given by the Apostle are very suitable and instructive—

He recommends to us three things:

***~~1. Activity of mind—~~***

The Jews were accustomed to wear long garments; these they girded about their loins, when it was needful to use expedition, [Luke 12:35-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.35-37). By this figure, familiar to them, the Apostle represents our duty. Our minds are dissipated by ten thousand vanities, and our affections, for the most part, flow loosely round us, but our thoughts and desires would be carefully gathered in. We would pray, like David, "Unite my heart to fear your name, [Psalm 86:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 86.11)." Heaven is not to be sought with a divided heart. Earthly affections would impede our progress, as flowing garments in a race: the prophet compares them to an incumbrance of thick clay upon the feet, [Habakkuk 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 2.6). We would therefore "gird up the loins of our mind," and "give all diligence to make our calling and election sure."

***~~2. Self-control in life—~~***

Self-control, in the scripture use of the term, means *moderation*. Excessive cares, and inordinate attachments, are very unfavorable to the soul: they so engross the mind with present things, as to draw it away from those which are eternal. We cannot therefore too carefully watch against these evils. We should endeavor to be "dying daily" to the world. We should be as one crucified to it; and it, as one crucified to us, [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.14). This is the state and character of every true Christian, [Galatians 5:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.24); and we must attain it, if we would successfully pursue the one thing needful.

***~~3. Steadfastness of faith—~~***

Faith respects the *certainty*of the promises; and hope respects the *accomplishment*of the promises. Now, our faith is apt to waver, and our hope, to languish. *Temptations*often allure us to forego our interest in heavenly things, and *unbelief*would often persuade us that we have no part or lot in them. But we must be careful never to be moved away from the hope of the Gospel, [Colossians 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.23). *Hope is the very anchor of the soul, that must keep us steadfast in this tempestuous world*, [Hebrews 6:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.19). We must "therefore hold fast our confidence and the rejoicing of our hope firm to the end, [Hebrews 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.6)." *The nearer we come to the prize, the more earnest would be our expectation of it.*If our conflicts be many, we should, even against hope, believe in hope, [Romans 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.18). The proper disposition of our souls is well described by the Apostles, [2 Peter 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.12); and it is to persons of this description only, that Christ's appearance will be a source of joy, [Hebrews 9:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.28).

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who are only nominal Christians—~~***

Your loins indeed are girt, but it is for the pursuit of earthly objects. Instead of having your souls engrossed with heavenly things, you are perfectly indifferent towards them. As for your hopes they extend to nothing but what relates to this present life. Alas! what a solemn contrast is there between you and the true Christian! What then, do you suppose, shall he brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ? The Apostle, in a fore-cited passage, tells you, it will be "vengeance, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8;" yes, and Jesus will bring it with his own hand. It is in vain to think that your portion will be the same with that of a diligent, self-denying Christian. But, blessed be God, grace is now brought to you by the Gospel; yes, all the glory of Heaven is now offered to you by God himself, [Acts 2:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.38-39). Only repent, and go unto God as reconciled in Christ Jesus, then shall you "pass from death to life," and from Hell to Heaven!

***~~2. Those who are Christians indeed—~~***

There are some, who "shine as lights in a dark world:" some, who, while living on earth, "have their conduct in Heaven." Doubtless, you meet with many conflicts and troubles in your way. To you then in particular is the text addressed: for persons circumstanced like you these words were written, [1 Peter 1:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.1); [1 Peter 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.6). Survey that grace which is now speedily to be brought unto you. Take a view of all the glory and felicity of the heavenly world; compare with that your light and momentary afflictions—and you will then soon form the same estimate as Paul before you did, [Romans 8:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.18). Be not then diverted from the great object of your pursuit. Remember the solemn caution which God himself has given you [Hebrews 10:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.38); and take for your encouragement that faithful promise, "He who endures to the end shall be saved! [Matthew 24:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.13)"

***~~#2386~~***

***~~NECESSITY OF HOLINESS~~***

***~~[1 Peter 1:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.15-16)~~***

"But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: Be holy, because I am holy."

It is thought by many that the Gospel is unfriendly to morality: and it must be confessed, that, when stated in all its freeness and in all its richness, it bears that aspect: for it proclaims a free and full salvation to men; and that solely by faith. It declares, that if men rely on their works, in any measure, for justification before God, or perform them in any respect with a view to obtain justification by them, they make void the cross of Christ, and cut themselves off from all hope of a saving interest in him.

The Gospel authorizes us to say, that the most abandoned of mankind are as welcome to all its benefits as the most moral; and that "where sin has abounded, grace shall much more abound." Now, these statements certainly do appear open to the objection that is brought against them: for, if past sins are no bar to our acceptance with God, and moral services cannot procure it, then to what purpose is it to avoid sin, or to do good works? We may as well at once give loose to all our evil propensities, and "continue in sin, that grace may abound."

Now, it is worthy of particular notice, that these were the very objections urged against Paul's statements, [Romans 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.1); [Romans 5:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.15); and he was constrained to answer them, not by weakening the force of his statements, but by obviating the objections themselves; and showing that the Gospel, as preached by him, both made provision for holiness, and secured it against a possibility of failure, [Romans 3:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.31). The truth is, that though the law, as a covenant, is superseded by the Gospel, which introduces a better covenant, it is in force as much as ever, as a rule of life; and that, while we are without the law, in relation to its ceremonial ordinances, we are "not without law to God, but under the law to Christ," in relation to its moral power and ascendency, [1 Corinthians 9:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 9.21).

Peter shows this with peculiar force: for, speaking to persons who were called to the knowledge of Christ and of salvation by him, he cites out of the Levitical law the command of God respecting holiness, and applies it to Christians as still existing in all its primitive force. Without any fear, therefore, of being legal, as it is called, or of clogging the Gospel with duties not pertaining to it, I proceed to set before you,

***~~I. The injunction given to us—~~***

Repeatedly was this command given to the Jews of old, [Leviticus 11:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 11.44); [Leviticus 19:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 19.2); [Leviticus 20:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 20.7). Let us consider:

***~~1. Its import—~~***

Holiness is a conformity to the mind and will of God. And to it are we called by the Gospel, [1 Thessalonians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.7). "The grace which brings salvation to us, 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)."

Negative holiness, if I may so express myself, is to be sought in the first instance. We are "no longer to fashion ourselves according to our former lusts in our ignorance, verse 14;" but, advancing to the positive execution of our duty, we are to be "holy in all manner of conduct."

In all our walk with God, we must be sincere and upright: there must be no allowed deceit in our hearts. And in our fellowship with men, every action, word, and thought, must be under the influence of love, and agreeable to its dictates. Neither times nor circumstances are so to operate as to produce in us any allowed deviation from God's perfect law. We are to be altogether "a holy people unto the Lord." It was for this end that the Lord Jesus Christ both lived and died, even "that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works, [Titus 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.14)." And to this are we chosen by God himself: for though "we were chosen to salvation, it was to be 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)." To this effect *Paul*speaks: "God has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we may be holy, [Ephesians 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.4)." And to the same effect *Peter*also says, in the commencement of this epistle, "We are elect, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience, verse 2." The command then is clear, that we are to be holy both in heart and life.

***~~2. The reason with which it is enforced—~~***

As children of God, we ought to be "children of obedience." The very circumstance of our having been "called" by divine grace, lays this obligation upon us. But there is a remarkable force in the reason here assigned, "Be holy; for I am holy." It seems to import these things: "Be holy; for without holiness you cannot belong to me, or enjoy me, or dwell with me in my kingdom." I could never acknowledge an unholy person as having a saving interest in my favor: it would be unworthy of me: it would be to make myself a patron and partaker of his sins. Nor could an unholy being gain access to me: his very dispositions would separate him from me; and prevent his having communion with me. Nor, though he were admitted into Heaven, could he be happy there. He would find no one there that resembled him, or that had a like taste with him, or that could join with him in any of his pursuits. He would be out of his element altogether. Nor would one in Hell pant more for deliverance, to get rid of his pains, than he would for an escape from the company and occupations for which he felt no relish. Hence, when God says, "Be holy; for I am holy," we must understand him, not as issuing a mere arbitrary command, but as declaring, that *none but a holy being has any reason to expect, or any capacity to enjoy, his favor*.

But we shall have a deeper insight into the injunction, if we consider,

***~~II. The exhortation founded upon it—~~***

"As he who has called you is holy, so be holy, in all manner of conduct." In these words the Apostle does not merely confirm the authority of the injunction itself, but points out the extent to which it is to be obeyed, and the object we must aim at in order to a full compliance with it.

***~~We must take God himself for our pattern—~~***

This is the idea suggested in the original. The natural perfections of the Deity are, and ever must be, peculiar to himself: but his moral perfections must be possessed by us, so far as we are capable of attaining them. His goodness, his patience, his mercy, his love, his truth, his faithfulness, are all to be imitated by us; so that "what God himself is in the world, that are we to be also, [1 John 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.17)."

That we might be at no loss on this all-important subject, the Lord Jesus Christ has "set us an example, that we might follow his steps, [1 Peter 2:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.24);" and we are "to walk in all things as he walked, 1 [John 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.6)," and to "purify ourselves even as he was pure, [1 John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.3)."

Of course, we cannot expect ever to *attain*his perfection: but that is no reason why we would not *aim*at it. There is no one point in which we should allow ourselves to fall short of it: we should strive to be holy in all things, even as God himself is holy; and "perfect, even as our Father who is in Heaven is perfect, [Matthew 5:48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.48)."

***~~By this must we show that we are his people indeed—~~***

It is to this that "God has called us." It is the very object which he had in view, in his whole work of grace upon our souls, even that we might be "created anew after his image, in righteousness and true holiness, [Ephesians 4:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.24)." And, if our hearts are upright before God, this is the thing which we shall pant after, no less than after Heaven itself. Sin will be our burden and aversion; and a conformity to God will be regarded as the first object of our desire. Yes, to be "like him" will be contemplated by us as the perfection of our happiness, in "seeing him as he is! [1 John 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.2)."

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who are yet in nature's "ignorance"—~~***

To exhort you to holiness would be a vain attempt. You have no eyes to discern, no heart to appreciate its excellence. You must have the eyes of your understanding enlightened by the Spirit of God, before you can form any just conception of the beauty of holiness—you must have your heart of stone removed, and a heart of flesh given you, before you can be capable of bearing any lineaments of the Divine image.

Let your first concern, therefore, be to become regenerate: for most assuredly, except you be born again, you can never enter into, nor ever see, the kingdom of God. Remember, I do not say this to those only who are openly and grossly wicked. I say it to the most moral among you. If you were as moral and amiable as Nicodemus himself, I would say to you, "You must be born again! [John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.3); [John 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.5); [John 3:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.7)." "A new heart must be given to you, and a new spirit must be put within you," before you can have the very first principles of holiness in your souls. I beg you, therefore, to seek this first of blessings at the hands of God; and not to rest until, through the operation of his Spirit upon your souls, "old things are passed away, and all things are become new."

***~~2. Those who have been "called" out of darkness into God's marvelous light—~~***

You are longing for the very blessing of which we have spoken. But in many of you there yet remains a considerable degree of ignorance respecting the appointed method of obtaining it. You are looking too much to your own exertions, and too little to the Savior: and hence you make but little progress in the divine life. Hence, also, you obtain but little comfort in your own souls. You are ready to say, *How can I be a child of God, when I bear so little of his image? And how can I venture to apply to myself his promises, while I am so unworthy of them?*

But these persons need to be informed, that they reverse God's method of making his people holy. They would become holy first, and then apply to themselves the promises of God: whereas they must first take to themselves the promises of God as sinners; and then, through their influence upon the soul, obtain a conformity to the Divine image. "God has given to us exceeding great and precious promises, that by them we may be made partakers of the Divine nature, [2 Peter 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.4)." Hence the Apostle says, "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness, both of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God, [2 Corinthians 7:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.1)."

Adopt this method, then: look to the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, and "lay hold on him as your sure hope and refuge." First receive him in all the freeness and all the fullness of his salvation; then shall you attain the holiness you desire; and be able to say with the Apostle, "We, beholding as in a looking-glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord! [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.18)."

***~~#2387~~***

***~~THE NECESSITY OF HOLY FEAR~~***

**[1 Peter 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.17)**

"Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear."

Christians possess many privileges by means of their relation to God; yet it is not their privileges, but their practical improvement of them, that will determine their state in the eternal world. They are called to be holy after the example of their God; and they must be reasonably conformed to his image, if they would be partakers of his glory. There will be no more partiality shown to them than to others in the day of judgment. God will determine the fate of all by their actions; and the condition for which they are meet, shall be the condition allotted them to all eternity. Peter, inculcating the need of holy fear, insists upon it particularly as conducing to fit us for that strict account to which we shall all be very shortly called. In discoursing on his words we shall show,

***~~I. The impartiality of the future judgment—~~***

***~~The children of God maintain communion with God as their Father in Christ—~~***

The Apostle speaks of Christians as "obedient children;" and as calling upon their Father for a supply of their daily needs. This is the privilege of all true Christians, "a spirit of adoption is given them, that they may cry, *Abba, Father!*" and, because they are children, they may expect to receive all the glory of Heaven as their inheritance.

***~~Nevertheless they will experience no partiality in the day of judgment—~~***

Among men it is but too common for parents to feel an undue bias in concerns relating to their children. But God has established one mode of procedure for all. His written law is the standard to which everything shall be referred.

The *principles*from which our actions flowed,  
the *manner*in which they were performed,  
and the *end*for which they were done—  
will be minutely investigated, and a sentence passed upon us according to their real quality. There will be no difference in this respect between Jew or Gentile, rich or poor; nor will any regard be shown to men's professions: it will be to no purpose to plead, "that they had Abraham to their Father," or that they had "cast out devils in the name of Christ;" the one inquiry will be: Were you holy? and according as this appears, their state will be for ever fixed.

Interested as we are in the event of that day, let us inquire into,

***~~II. The influence which this consideration should have upon us—~~***

***~~God requires us to pass our short span of life in reverential fear—~~***

We are "sojourners in this world, as all our fathers were." It is but a short time that any of us have to live, and then we shall be removed to our long home. The present state is a state of probation—a moment allotted us to prepare for eternity. Under such circumstances we should be "working out our salvation with fear and trembling." Not that we would indulge a servile dread of God as a hard master, and a vindictive judge—but a*holy reverential fear of offending him, and a tender concern to please him in all things*. This is "the fear in which we should walk all the day long."

***~~Nor can anything tend more to produce this fear in us than the consideration now before us—~~***

Shall I be judged according to my works? Will every action, word, and thought, be weighed in the balance of the sanctuary? Will all my motives be inspected by Him, who "searches the heart and mind?" Surely I have need to fear, lest some hidden abomination lurk within me, and lest I would be "speaking peace to my soul, when there is no peace." I need be studious to please him, whose favor or displeasure are of such importance to my soul. If I must stand or fall for eternity, it befits me to redouble my care.

***~~Now, methinks, you will say, 'Give me some special directions, that I may know how to carry into effect the Apostle's advice.' This I will endeavor to do in four particulars:~~***

***~~1. Be watchful against all occasions of sin—~~***

Our Lord has taught us to "watch and pray lest we enter into temptation;" for in temptation how rarely do we retain our integrity! Let not those pretend to fear God, who needlessly expose themselves to the assaults of Satan. If we would "keep our garments clean," we must be careful where, and with whom we walk.

Does the command to "come out from the world" appear severe? it is not severe, but merciful, and necessary. *If I bade you not to go where the plague was raging, would you account that severe?*May God enable all of you carefully to obey it, that you may escape infection, and live!

***~~2. Reflect frequently on the strictness of that scrutiny which we must undergo in the day of judgment—~~***

When tempted to sin, let us not ask, "What will the world say?" But, "How will this appear in God's eyes? How will this affect my eternal state?" Apply this thought to your duties as well as to your temptations; How will this service appear when brought to the touchstone of God's Word? If this be done, too many of us will have to rank their services among their greatest sins.

***~~3. Apply continually to the blood of Christ for pardon—~~***

However circumspect we are, our feet will contract some defilement in this polluted world; and "if Christ does not wash us, we can have no part with him." Indeed our very *tears*need to be washed, and our *repentances*to be repented of: nor is there any fountain but that of the Redeemer's blood, that can ever cleanse us. There, however, "sins even of a crimson die may be made as white as snow!" Let there then be no day wherein we do not bathe in that fountain, lest sin be found upon us in the day that we give up our account to God.

***~~4. Be much in prayer for the direction and assistance of the Holy Spirit—~~***

In vain will be all our fear and caution, if God does not both direct and uphold us: if he leaves us for one moment, we fall, "without him we can do nothing." Let us then be often praying, "Hold me up, and I shall be safe!" Thus shall we escape the snares that are laid for our feet, and "be preserved blameless unto his heavenly kingdom!"

***~~#2388~~***

***~~REDEMPTION FROM A VAIN AND SINFUL LIFE~~***

***~~[1 Peter 1:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.18-19)~~***

"For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect!"

The Christian's duty is by no means easy to be performed. It requires the exercise of much firmness and self-denial. The inspired writers, aware of this, enforce it by every consideration that can influence our minds. In the passage before us the Apostle is recommending a holy fear and jealousy lest we would be drawn back into the love of this present world. He first urges this duty from a regard to the impartial tribunal of God, verse 17, and then from the very intent of Christ's death. This latter and most powerful argument calls for our attention at this time. To illustrate it we shall consider,

***~~I. The extent of man's redemption: Jesus redeems us from both sin and Hell—~~***

***~~The "conduct" of men in all ages and in all places has been the same—~~***

Different customs indeed have prevailed in different countries, but all have walked after the imagination of their own hearts: they have prohibited such things as they thought injurious to the welfare of society, but left themselves at liberty to consult their own inclinations in everything else. Their practices in time formed a kind of law. What was sanctioned by one generation was followed by another. And the "conduct received by tradition from their fathers" was that which was adopted by every succeeding age.

***~~It is almost superfluous to observe that such conduct has been "vain"—~~***

Let anyone ask himself what has his past conduct profited him? Has it given him any solid satisfaction? No! the remembrance of it cannot at all assuage the anguish of a mind bowed down with affliction, much less of a mind burdened with a sense of guilt. Has it brought honor to God, or any real benefit to mankind? It has been the means of almost shutting out the knowledge of God from the world; but has never honored him in any single instance.

As for mankind, if it have in any respect advanced their temporal interests, it has blinded their eyes, and hardened their hearts, and encouraged them to walk in the broad way that leads to destruction!

***~~From this however, the true Christian has been redeemed—~~***

It is not only from *Hell*that the Christian is delivered, but from *sin!* He once indeed "walked according to the course of this world (which is the devil's course, [Ephesians 2:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.2-3).) fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind even as others." But now he has seen the vanity of such a life: he proposes to himself another pattern, even Jesus, "who has set an example for us, that we would follow his steps." He is no longer "conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of his mind." By the cross of Christ, the world has become loathsome to him, even as a crucified object, [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.14). While he is indeed in the world, he performs the duties of it in a conscientious manner: but he goes into it only, as a physician into a hospital, from a sense of duty, and for the good of others; and is glad enough to retire from it to a purer atmosphere!

He endeavors to keep before his eyes:

***~~II. The price Jesus paid for him—~~***

***~~Slaves and captives are redeemed with silver and gold; but gold was of no value in the redemption of our souls—~~***

The whole world was not a sufficient price for one soul! It could not atone for our sin or reconcile an offended God: nor could it at all avail to change our carnal dispositions. Gold and silver might rivet our chains, and fix us more strongly in a vain conduct; but it could never detach us from the love of this present world.

***~~That which alone was of value sufficient, was, "the precious blood of Christ"—~~***

The *lamb*that was offered daily in sacrifice to God was to be spotless and without blemish. By its blood, atonement was made for the sins of the Jewish nation; and they were preserved a holy and peculiar people. This was a typical ordinance: it represented Christ, who in due time "offered himself without spot to God:" and the benefits visibly, and in a figure, enjoyed by the Jewish nation—are invisibly, but really enjoyed by us. We have the *substance*of which they had the *shadow*.

Well then might the Apostle call his blood "precious." There is no bondage from which it does not deliver us. Were we under the curse and condemnation of the law? The blood of Christ redeems us from the penalty of all our transgressions. It gives peace to the guilty soul, and liberty to the captive soul. It frees, moreover, from all the snares and entanglements of this vain world. This is mentioned both in the text and in other places as a principal end of Christ's death, [Galatians 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.4). Precious indeed is it, when its influence is thus felt. *To a true Christian the blood of Christ is not less precious as delivering him from sin, than it is as delivering him from Hell itself.*

While we wonder that such a price was ever paid, let us inquire into,

***~~III. The effect which the consideration of this price would have upon us—~~***

***~~The Apostle introduces the text as an argument for passing our time in fear—~~***

A slavish fear is one of those things from which we are delivered by the blood of Christ. We sprinkle that blood on our door-posts, and have no dread of the destroying angel. But there is a holy jealousy, which it is our duty ever to maintain. We are only *sojourners*in this world, and are hastening to our Father's house. We are moreover in danger of being diverted from our path. We have a subtle adversary, and a deceitful heart. Sin itself also is deceitful, and will beguile us, if we do not watch against its wiles. We would therefore be on our guard, and pass the time of our sojourning here in fear.

***~~And well may this effect be produced by such a wonderful consideration—~~***

Were we laden with bags of gold, we would be cautious how we ventured among thieves and robbers. And shall we be careless when we carry about with us what is of more value than the whole world? *Shall we trifle with that which nothing but the precious blood of God's own Son could redeem?* Shall Satan as a roaring lion go about seeking to devour us, and we not stand on our guard against him? O let not that precious blood be so vile in our eyes. Let not our souls appear of so little value. Let us rather watch night and day. It is but a little time: soon we shall be at home, safe in the bosom of our Lord, safe beyond the reach of harm!

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

***~~1. Let us inquire what we "know" concerning these things—~~***

The Apostle takes for granted that all Christians "know" them. But do you know them? Do you know that a worldly conduct is sin in God's eyes? Do you know that no resolutions, no services, yes, nothing but the precious blood of Christ could ever redeem you from it? And do you know by daily experience the efficacy of his blood in that view? "Examine yourselves whether you are in the faith," and whether you have that deadness to the world, which alone can warrant a favorable conclusion. If you are Christ's, "you are not of the world, even as he was not of the world [John 17:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.16);" "you are dead to it," and "have your conduct in Heaven, [Philippians 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.20)."

***~~2. Let us labor to experience them more and more—~~***

There is something very fascinating in the temptations of the world. Its pleasures, riches, or honors are but too apt to draw us aside. But whenever you are tempted, say, Shall I return to that bondage from which I have been redeemed with the precious blood of Christ? Shall I trample under foot the Son of God, and crucify him afresh, [Hebrews 10:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.29). Shall I, as it were, see his dead corpse lying in my way, and step over it to the gratification of my base desires? Surely such reflections will not fail to animate your resolution, and to keep you at a distance from those scenes of vanity, where your steadfastness would be endangered. Let us live as citizens of a better country, and "no more fashion ourselves according to our former lusts in our ignorance, [1 Peter 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.14)." Let us drink of purer pleasures—even of "that river, the streams whereof make glad the city of God." Thus, experiencing the full benefits of redeeming love on earth, we shall before long sing its praises in Heaven for evermore!

***~~#2389~~***

***~~THE FATHER'S PART IN THE WORK OF REDEMPTION~~***

***~~[1 Peter 1:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.20-21)~~***

"He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God."

The salvation of man is with great propriety ascribed to Christ, because he laid down his own life as a ransom for us. But we shall have very imperfect views of this mystery, if we do not trace it up to God the Father, and see him concurring with Christ in every part, and performing, as it were, an appropriate office in the economy of redemption. Indeed a distinct knowledge of the Father's work is highly conducive to our progress in the divine life. This being intimated in the text, we shall endeavor to show,

***~~I. What part the Father bore in the work of redemption—~~***

***~~The Father ordained his Son to his mediatorial office from all eternity—~~***

As the prophets frequently speak of the Messiah as sent and qualified for his office by the Father, [Isaiah 42:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 42.1), so our Lord himself constantly acknowledged that he received his commission from him, [John 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.28); [John 8:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.42). Nor was he first appointed when he became incarnate: he was fore-ordained before the foundation of the world. *The time of his incarnation, the manner of his death, together with every the minutest circumstance relating to him, were fixed in the Divine counsels!* [Acts 2:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.23); [Acts 4:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.28). Hence he is called the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, [Revelation 13:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 13.8).

***~~In due season the Father manifested his Son to the world—~~***

The Father prepared a body in the Virgin's womb for him; and by a supernatural star conducted the Magi to him as soon as he was born. He afterwards bore testimony to him repeatedly by an audible voice from Heaven, and by causing the Holy Spirit to light visibly upon him with the hovering motion of a dove. In all the miracles which he wrought, the Father bore witness of him, [John 5:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.36). Even in the hour of his death, when most of all his divine mission might seem doubtful, even then did the Father so testify of him, as to make the Centurion, who superintended the execution, exclaim, Truly this was the Son of God! [Matthew 27:54](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.54).

***~~After the death of Jesus, the Father raised him up again from the dead—~~***

Jesus was able to raise himself, and is often said to have risen by his own power, [John 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.19); [John 10:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.18). But we are expressly told here, and in many other places, that the Father also raised him, [Acts 2:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.32); [Acts 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.10); [Acts 5:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.30). Indeed, as the Father, to whose justice he paid the debt, gave, as it were, the commission, by virtue of which he was imprisoned in the grave, it was necessary that he would also give him his discharge, when the demands of justice were fully satisfied. Accordingly, his restoration to life is spoken of as the strongest evidence of his Messiahship, and of his having finished that work which the Father had given him to do, [Romans 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.4).

***~~Lastly, the Father exalted Jesus to Heaven, and invested him with all the glory thereof—~~***

Jesus, in his obedience, had looked to "the joy that was set before him;" and when that obedience was fulfilled, his Father gave him the promised reward. He placed that very person, who was crucified, at his own right hand. He seated him upon his own eternal throne, and committed the government of the universe into his hands [Philippians 2:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.9-11). He has commanded all to honor him even as himself; and *to all eternity shall that adorable Lamb of God be the medium of his people's happiness*, as he has been the Author and Procurer of it.

That this is not a matter of mere speculation will appear, if we inquire,

***~~II. What effect the consideration of the work of redemption intended to produce upon us?~~***

*The ultimate end for which the Father has thus interposed on our behalf, is to glorify himself in the salvation of man.* But there are other and more immediate ends, which the knowledge of his interference is intended to accomplish:

***~~1. The work of redemption should confirm our faith—~~***

We are called particularly to believe that Christ was the true Messiah; that he performed everything that was necessary for our salvation; and that the Father is willing to be reconciled to all who come to him by Jesus. Now it is not possible to entertain a doubt of any one of these points, if we duly consider what the Father has done for us.

Would God have so frequently, and in such a wonderful manner, borne witness to Jesus if he had been an impostor?

Would he have liberated him from the prison of the grave, and have exalted him to glory, if the work assigned him had been left unfinished?

Would he have sent him into the world to redeem us, and have so gloriously rewarded his services, if, after all, he were not willing to accept returning prodigals?

Can we suppose that God has done all these things only to mock, and to deceive us?

Far be it from us to entertain the thought one moment. Let us rather conclude, that, as "it is impossible for God to lie," so it is most injurious to him to question one jot or tittle of the record which he has given us of his Son.

***~~2. The work of redemption should enliven our hope—~~***

Many are the grounds upon which we are apt to indulge fear and despondency: but there is not one, which a due consideration of what God has done would not instantly remove.

Do we suppose ourselves to have been overlooked by God? He gave his Son to be "an atoning sacrifice, not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the world;" and has asserted with an oath, that he is "not willing that any would perish, but that all would come to repentance and live."

Do we imagine ourselves to be too vile? "It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that he sent his Son to save sinners, even the chief."

Do we fear lest, notwithstanding we do believe, we would by some means or other be left to perish? Behold he has exalted his Son as our Head, our Representative, our Forerunner, in whom we are already accepted, and with whom we shall assuredly be glorified in due season. Yes, "he has made his Son to be Head over all things to his Church," in order that he may put all his enemies under his feet, and secure the purchase of his own blood.

Let us then yield no more to gloomy apprehensions, but ask of God the gift of his blessed Spirit, through whose powerful influence we shall both abound and rejoice in hope, [Romans 15:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 15.13).

***~~In conclusion let me tell you—~~***

***~~1. Who they are that are savingly interested in this great mystery—~~***

It was manifested for "those who by Christ do believe in God:" these are the persons savingly interested in it, these universally, and these alone. Show me a poor self-condemning sinner, one who under a sense of his utter guilt and helplessness comes to God through Christ, renouncing all dependence on himself, and hoping for acceptance solely through the merits and mediation of the Lord Jesus, he is the person for whom God sent his only-begotten Son; he is the person for whose benefit God raised up and glorified his Son, and for whose complete salvation he has invested his Son with all power in Heaven and in earth.

A man who feels not his own guilt and danger has no interest in all this; nor has the man who relies in any measure on his own righteousness or strength for his acceptance with God.*It is the penitent believer, and he alone, who can derive any comfort from this stupendous mystery*.

Dear brethren, let this sink deep into your hearts; you must come to God through Christ, and "believe in God in and by Christ." I beg you, do not forget this: for, until you come to God in this way, you have no saving faith, no scriptural hope of eternal salvation. But, if once you are brought to this state of affiance in the Lord Jesus, whatever you may have been, or whatever you may have done, in times past, God's promises are made to you, and shall be fulfilled in you; for "they are all yes and amen in Christ Jesus." "All things are yours, if you are Christ's; and, as Christ is God's," so shall you be to all eternity.

***~~2. What more particularly this mystery speaks to true believers—~~***

God's design in all was, "that your faith and hope might be in God." This then it says to you; Believe in God, and hope in God. Did God fail in anything which he had promised to his dear Son? Neither then will he fail you, if only you believe in him. Look at the Lord Jesus: see his discouragements. See him in the manger at Bethlehem: what can that infant ever do? See him in the garden of Gethsemane, and on the cross, and in the grave: what can be hoped for from him?

But behold him rising from the grave, ascending to Heaven, seated on his throne, and invested with all power in Heaven and in earth; and then you will see what God can and will do for you in your most desperate condition. The power exercised for Christ is the same that is engaged for you: yes, and the work wrought in and for Christ, is the very pattern and pledge of what shall be wrought for you.

Do I speak too strongly here? Consult the Apostle Paul—it is the very thing which he himself speaks by inspiration of God: he declares, that "the exceeding greatness of God's power which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him up from the dead, and set him at his own right hand above all the principalities and powers of earth and Hell—is that which he will exercise towards every believing soul, [Ephesians 1:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.19-21)."

Look then to God and "believe in him!" Yes look at Christ Jesus, and "hope," that, for his sake, all that has been done in and for him, shall be done in and for you. Think of nothing less: expect nothing less: be satisfied with nothing less: and, if at any time a doubting thought arise, chide your drooping spirit, as David did, and say, "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance and my God, [Psalm 42:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.11)."

***~~#2390~~***

***~~LOVE TO THE BRETHREN~~***

***~~[1 Peter 1:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.22)~~***

"Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart."

As our Christian *profession*lays us under peculiar obligations to holiness, so our Christian *experience*would influence us to exert ourselves as much as possible in the service of our God. The more we have attained, the more we would aspire after still higher attainments. To this effect is Peter's exhortation in the passage before us. In his words we may observe,

***~~I. What he takes for granted respecting all true Christians—~~***

The Apostle, writing to those who professed to be followers of Christ, gives them credit that they were his disciples indeed; and takes for granted,

***~~1. That they had "obeyed the truth"—~~***

To "obey the truth" is, in scripture-language, the same as to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. The substance of the divine record is, that in Christ Jesus there is life, and that we either have life or are destitute of it, according as we possess, or are destitute of, the knowledge of Christ, [1 John 5:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.11-12). This is the true record of God, which we are enjoined to receive with all humility and thankfulness; and when we so embrace it as to found all our hopes of salvation entirely upon it, then we may properly be said to obey the truth.

Now this every Christian does; he does not merely give his assent to any propositions about Christ, but he "flees to Christ for refuge," and relies upon him as his only Savior. And the Apostle takes for granted (with good reason too) that they to whom he was writing, had so received Christ: for, however they might have been baptized into the Christian faith, they were no better than mere heathen, if they had not truly believed in him.

***~~2. That in obeying the truth they had also "purified their souls"—~~***

We may cleanse the outward part of our conduct by various means. A regard to our reputation, a self-righteous desire of recommending ourselves to God, or a spirit of pride and self-delight—will be sufficient to rectify in a measure our external behavior; but it is the property of faith alone to purify the heart! [Acts 15:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 15.9). And as nothing but faith will prevail for this end, so wherever faith is, it will infallibly produce this effect, [1 John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.3). The faith that has not this fruit is dead; and will no more avail for our salvation than the faith of devils! [James 2:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.19-20). Well therefore does the Apostle take it for granted, that they, to whom he wrote, experienced this effect of their faith; seeing that it is the principal intent of the Gospel to ensure and produce it, [Titus 2:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.11-12).

***~~3. That they had so purified their souls as to have attained a sincere love of the brethren—~~***

As faith purifies the heart, so in a more especial manner it "works by love, [Galatians 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.6)." The love of the brethren never was nor ever can be, found in an unrenewed soul. There may be a semblance of it; there may be a partial attachment to our own sect and party, or a carnal attachment to a person who is spiritually-minded; but *there never can be a love to spiritual persons simply on account of their relation to Christ, and their conformity to his image*. But let the smallest portion of true grace be imparted to the soul, and instantly will this love spring up in the heart. Many things indeed may occur in the mind to restrain its exercise for a season, and to impede its growth; but it may be taken for granted that this principle both abides and operates in the heart of every true Christian, "he who loves him who begat, cannot but love those who are begotten of him, [1 John 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.1)."

***~~4. That they had attained all this through the influence of the Holy Spirit—~~***

*Faith itself cannot exist in the heart until the Spirit of God has wrought it in us.* He must overcome our reluctance, and make us willing to obey the truth, [Psalm 110:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 110.3). Neither can our hearts be purified but by the same almighty power. Faith indeed is the instrument whereby our sanctification is effected; but the Holy Spirit is the agent. Every progressive step of it must be wrought by him, [Romans 8:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.13). Our love can now from no other source; whatever be the grace that is exercised by us, he must be acknowledged as the author of it, "it is the same Spirit that works all in all, [1 Corinthians 12:7-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 12.7-11)."

If what is here taken for granted is really found in us, nothing will be more acceptable than,

***~~II. The exhortation grounded upon it—~~***

"The end of the commandment," says the Apostle, "is love;" and our profession as Christians supposes that it exists, and operates, in our hearts. But care must be taken that it be exercised,

***~~1. With sincerity—~~***

There is a politeness and civility which is only a counterfeit of Christian love: but it is not this love which the text inculcates. We are indeed commanded in other parts of Scripture to "be courteous;" and it would be well if some professors of religion paid more attention to this command. But the love enjoined in the text, is a "sincere" love to all the saints, arising from a view of their relation to God, and to ourselves. It must be an abiding principle in our hearts, operating uniformly in the whole of our conduct towards them. *It must lead us to exercise meekness, forbearance, and forgiveness, and to seek both their temporal and spiritual welfare, as occasion may serve*,1 Corinthians 13:4-7. In short, our love must be without dissimulation, [Romans 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.9); it must be not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth, [1 John 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.18).

***~~2. With purity—~~***

Even where there is a portion of Christian love, there may be a considerable alloy mixed with it. We may be influenced too much by selfish considerations. We may be seeking our own interest or honor, while we imagine that we are giving a testimony of Christian love. Yes, our love which was pure at first, may easily degenerate into mere carnal affection. The greatest caution is necessary, especially among young persons, lest our hearts betray us into indiscretion of any kind, and Satan take advantage of us to lead us into sin.

***~~3. With fervor—~~***

An *empty profession of benevolence*to the poor will not be deemed equivalent to an actual relieving of their needs; nor will a cold expression of regard to the brethren fulfill the sacred duty of love to them. In the latter especially, it would know no bounds, but those which were affixed to the love of Christ. Did he love us to such a degree as to lay down his life for us? We ought also to lay down our lives for the brethren, [1 John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.16). There is no service, however difficult or self-denying, which we would not render to them for good. We should love one another, as the Greek word means, "intensely." To sum up all in one word, we should love one another, as Christ has loved us, [Ephesians 5:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.1-2). [John 15:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.12).

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

Let us,

***~~1. Inquire whether the things here taken for granted are found in us—~~***

Have we indeed received the Holy Spirit? and through his almighty influence have we believed in Christ, and purified our souls, and received a principle of holy love implanted in us? And do these attainments become so many motives to diligence, and means of spiritual advancement! Let this be duly weighed, and it will serve to show us what we are. If we are in the faith, our self-examination will increase our comfort; and, if we are not in the faith, it may be the means of carrying conviction to the soul. Let us be assured that faith, love, and holiness universally characterize the Christian, and that our evidences of conversion will bear an exact proportion to our attainments in these things, [John 13:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.35) and [Isaiah 61:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 61.9). Let therefore our exercise of these graces be so manifest and undeniable, that the Spirit's agency in us may be confessed by all, [1 John 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.19).

***~~2. Endeavor to fulfill the duties that are here imposed on us—~~***

A sweeter command cannot possibly be given. To obey it is to enjoy a Heaven upon earth. *Heaven is a region of ineffable, unceasing love*; and the more we have of that divine principle, the more happy shall we be. Let us then strive to mortify whatever may retard its growth in our souls. Let us beware lest through the abounding of iniquity it wax cold. And let us strive to exercise it with all that purity and fervor which befit persons so highly privileged.

***~~#2391~~***

***~~GROWTH IN GRACE IS TO BE DESIRED~~***

***~~[1 Peter 2:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.1-3)~~***

"Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is gracious."

A strange opinion has prevailed among some, that there is no such thing as growth in grace. But the whole tenor of Scripture, from one end of it to the other, proclaims the contrary. We will look no further than to the passage before us, and to the context connected with it. In the beginning of his epistle, the Apostle had spoken of Christians as "begotten by God the Father to a living hope, [1 Peter 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.3)." To stir them up to walk worthy of their high calling, he says to them, "Gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end, as obedient children; not fashioning yourselves according to your former lusts in your ignorance; but, as he who has called you is holy, so be holy in all manner of conduct; because it is written, be holy, for I am holy, [1 Peter 1:13-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.13-16)." This injunction he enforces by a great variety of arguments. He urges, first, the consideration, that God the Father will judge them according to their works, [1 Peter 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.17); then, that they have been redeemed by God the Son, [1 Peter 1:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.18-19); and then, that they have been born of God the Holy Spirit, through the instrumentality of the preached word, which unalterably inculcates and requires holiness, [1 Peter 1:23-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.23-25).

From these premises he deduces the exhortation in our text: "Therefore, like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is gracious."

Here the idea is kept up of their being children of God, though children but newly born; and they are urged to desire and feed upon that blessed provision which God has made for them in his word, and which alone can secure their growth in the divine life.

The words, thus viewed, will lead us to consider,

***~~I. The character of God's children—~~***

Many are the descriptions given of them in the Holy Scriptures; but there is not one in all the inspired volume more simple or more accurate than this: "They have *tasted*that the Lord is gracious." This, I say, is,

***~~1. Their universal experience—~~***

There is not a child of God in the universe to whom this character does not belong. The very instant that a child is born of God, this is his experience. Indeed it is of "new-born babes" that it is spoken. As to their knowledge of God, his nature, his perfections, his purposes—it may be extremely limited and imperfect. Even of the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of "the exceeding riches of God's grace as displayed in him," they may know but little: but they have "tasted that the Lord is gracious," and they do assuredly know it by their own happy experience.

If the person is young or old, rich or poor, learned or unlearned—he has learned this, and knows it, and feels it in his inmost soul. He has heard of the Savior; he has sought for mercy through him; and he has received into his soul a sense of God's pardoning love and mercy in Christ Jesus: and in this he does rejoice, yes, and will rejoice. He may indeed have received but a *taste*: but a taste he has received, and it is "sweeter to him than thousands of gold and silver." The most uncivilized savage, when born of God, is in this respect on a footing with the most enlightened philosopher: he has believed in Christ; and he "makes Christ all his salvation, and all his desire."

***~~2. Their exclusive distinction—~~***

As simple as this is, there is not a creature upon the face of the whole earth of whom it can with truth be predicated, but of one who has been "begotten of God," and "born again of the Holy Spirit." Others may be very wise and learned, and may be able to descant with accuracy upon all the deep things of God. They may in words and in profession greatly magnify the grace of God: but they have never had a *taste*of it in their own souls. And the reason is plain: they have never felt their undone state by nature: they have never been sensible of the immense load of guilt which they have contracted by their own actual transgressions. *Consequently, they have never trembled for fear of God's wrath, nor with strong crying and tears sought deliverance from it through the atoning blood of Jesus*. Hence the grace of God has never been extended to them; and consequently they have never "tasted that the Lord is gracious." They, as I have before said, may descant learnedly upon the subject of divine grace; but *their discussions proceed from the head only, and not from the heart*. As a man who has never tasted honey, however conversant he may be with its qualities, has no just conception of its flavor, so none but he who has experienced the grace of God in his soul can know really what it is. *He knows it, because he has tasted it*: and others know it not, because they have not tasted it.

The Apostle addressing these declares to them,

**II. The duty** **of God's children—**

He teaches them,

***~~1. What they are to put away, as injurious to their welfare—~~***

*The unconverted man, though he may appear righteous before men, is in reality full of the most abominable evils.*He may not indulge in any gross sins; but he is full of "malice" towards those who have injured him in any tender point; and would feel gratified, rather than pained, at any evil that would befall him. His whole converse with mankind, too, is for the most part little better than one continued system of "deceit and hypocrisy," which are the two chief constituents of what is called *politeness*. If a rival surpasses him in anything on which his heart is set, and gains the honors which he panted for, he will soon find that the spirit which is in him lusts to "envy." Moreover, whether he is more or less guarded in his general conversation, he will find in himself a propensity to "evil speaking," as if he felt himself more elevated in proportion as others are depressed. Now these dispositions are more or less dominant in the natural man, as Paul has strongly and repeatedly declared, [Ephesians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.3). [Titus 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 3.3); and, after a person is converted to the Christian faith, he needs to watch and pray against them with all imaginable care: for as inveterate disorders in the constitution will impede the growth, and destroy the vigor, of the body—so will these hateful dispositions "war against," and, if not subdued and mortified, prevail to the destruction of, the soul. These things therefore must be "put away."

***~~2. What they must seek after, as conducive to their growth—~~***

As "the word is the incorruptible seed of which they are born, [1 Peter 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.23)," so is it the food upon which, as "new-born babes," they must exist. *In the inspired volume, they have truth without any mixture of error*. All human writings take partial views of things, and all more or less savor of human infirmity. Nor can the soul live upon them. If we have read a human composition two or three times, we are weary of it: but this is not the case with *the Word of God—that is ever new, and ever sweet to the taste of a regenerate soul*.

A little infant desires nothing so much as its mother's bosom. From day to day it prefers that, before everything else that can be offered to it: and it thrives with that, better than with any food that human ingenuity can devise. So *in the "sincere" and unadulterated "milk of the word," there is something more sweet and nutritious, than in all other books in the universe*.

In the inspired volume, God is presented to the soul under such endearing characters; the Lord Jesus Christ is set forth in such glorious views; the precepts, the promises, the threatenings, the examples, are all so harmoniously blended. In short, truths of every kind are conveyed to the mind with such simple majesty and commanding force, that they insinuate themselves into the whole frame of the soul, and nourish it in a way that no human composition can.

This therefore we should desire, in order to our spiritual growth. We should read it, meditate upon it, and delight ourselves in it. We should embrace every truth contained in it; its precepts, in order to a more entire conformity to them; its promises, in order to the encouragement of our souls in aspiring after the highest degrees of holiness. In short, we would get it blended with the whole frame and constitution of our souls, so that, to all who behold us from day to day, our growth and profiting may appear: nor should we be satisfied with any attainment, until we have arrived at "the full measure of the stature of Christ."

***~~Let me further improve this subject,~~***

***~~1. In a way of inquiry—~~***

I am not now about to inquire whether you have made a great proficiency in the divine life, but whether you have ever begun to live, or whether you are yet "dead in trespasses and sins?" In all the book of God, there is not a more simple, or more decisive test, than in the words before us. The extent of your knowledge or attainments is at present out of the question. The only point I wish to ascertain is this, "Have you been born again?" If you have not made any progress in the divine life, are you "as new-born babes?" Have you been brought, as it were, into a new world? Are you living altogether in a new way? I do not ask whether, in "passing from death unto life," you have experienced any terrors of mind; or whether the change has been so sudden, that you can fix on the time when it commenced. But this I ask, Whether you have attained such views of Jesus Christ, that he is become truly "precious to your souls, verse 7."

You cannot but know, that, however you may have been accustomed to call Christ your Savior, you have not really found any delight in him in past times. But if you have been "born again of the Spirit," a change has taken place in this particular, and you have been made to feel your obligations to him, and to claim him as "the Friend, and the Beloved of your soul." I entreat you to examine carefully into this matter; for, *if this change has not taken place within you, you are yet in your sins*.

Oh, reflect on what our blessed Lord has so solemnly and so repeatedly affirmed, "Truly, truly, I say unto you, that except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God, [John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.3); [John 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.5)."

If you ask, What shall I do to attain this experience? I would say, Search out your sins, in order that you may know your need of Christ; and then go to him as the friend of sinners, who casts out none who come unto him. In a word, I would refer you to the words of our text, as contained in the 34th Psalm, from whence they are taken, "O taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man that trusts in him! [Psalm 34:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.8)."

***~~2. In a way of affectionate exhortation—~~***

You have reason, I will suppose, to believe that you have been born again; and that, though of no great stature in the divine life, you are new-born babes. If this be so, you have more reason to be thankful than if you were made possessors of the whole world! I therefore call upon you to bless and magnify the Lord with your whole souls. But be not contented to continue in a state of infantile weakness, but seek to grow up into the stature of "young men, and fathers, [1 John 2:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.12-13)."

Some imagine that, as children, they may stand excused for the smallness of their attainments; but this is a grievous error. See with what severity Paul reproved the Corinthian converts for their lack of progress in the divine life. Their continuing babes in their attainments proved them to be yet carnal, instead of spiritual; and prevented his feeding them with stronger meat, that would have nourished and strengthened their souls, [1 Corinthians 3:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.1-4). See also how he condemned the same in the Hebrew converts, who by their infantile weakness were incapacitated for the reception of those sublime truths, which he would gladly have imparted to them, [Hebrews 5:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.12); [Hebrews 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.14).

Be afraid then of standing still in religion: for if you make no progress in it, then you will speedily go backward; and if you decline from God's ways, then O, how terrible will your state become! The Apostle tells us, that "if, after having tasted of the heavenly gift, and tasted of the good Word of God and the powers of the world to come, you fall away, it is impossible for you ever to be renewed unto repentance, seeing that you will have crucified the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame! [Hebrews 6:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.4-6)."

Seek then to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; and, by a constant attention to the suggestions in my text, so increase with the increase of God, that you may grow up into Christ in all things as your living Head, and finally attain the full measure of the stature of Christ."

***~~#2392~~***

***~~THE TEMPLE, A TYPE~~***

**[1 Peter 2:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.4-5)**

"As you come to him, the living Stone--rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him--you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

As in the natural life, so in the spiritual, a state of maturity is attained by a slow and gradual progression; but every Christian should be aspiring after a further growth in grace, in order that he may reach the full measure of the stature of Christ. For this end the Apostle exhorts those who had tasted that the Lord is gracious, to covet the sincere milk of the word; and to come continually to Christ, in order to their more abundant growth in faith and love. His allusions to the material temple are worthy of our attentive consideration: he compares Christ to the foundation-stone, and believers to the other stones built upon it; thereby showing, that the temple had a typical reference to them,

***~~I. In its foundation—~~***

***~~Christ is here represented as the foundation-stone on which all are built—~~***

When personally considered, Christ is represented as the temple itself, in which dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead, [John 2:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.19-21); but, as considered in relation to his people, he is the foundation-stone, that supports the whole edifice, [Isaiah 28:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 28.16). [1 Corinthians 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.11). The quality ascribed to this stone is indeed singular; but it is perfectly suited to him of whom it is spoken. Christ is called "a living" stone, not merely as being of distinguished excellence (as he is also the "living bread," and "living water") but as having life in himself, and being the author of life to all who depend upon him: a quickening energy proceeds from him, which pervades and animates every part of this spiritual fabric, [John 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.21); [John 5:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.26).

***~~In this situation He is precious to all who know him—~~***

He has indeed in all ages been "rejected by men," who, blinded by Satan and their own lusts, neither "saw any beauty in him for which he was to be desired," "nor would come to him that they might have life." The very persons appointed to build the temple have been the first to reject him, [Acts 4:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.11); they could not endure that so much honor would be put upon him; or that they would be constrained to acknowledge him as the one source of all their stability. But he was "chosen of God" from all eternity, as the only Being capable of supporting the weight of this vast edifice; and, so perfectly is he suited to his place, that "he is precious" to God, and precious to all who are built upon him.

If all the angels in Heaven were ordered to fill his place but for a moment, the whole building would fall to ruins: but in him there is a *suitableness*and *sufficiency*, that at once delights the heart of God, [Isaiah 42:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 42.1), and inspires his people with implicit confidence.

Nor is the foundation only of the temple typical; there is a typical reference also,

***~~II. In its superstructure—~~***

***~~Believers are the stones of which the temple is composed—~~***

Every man, in his natural state, is as the stones in a quarry, ignorant of the end to which he is destined, and incapable of doing anything towards the accomplishment of it. But the great Master-builder, by the instrumentality of those who labor under his direction, selects some from the rest, and fashions them for the places which he intends them to occupy in this spiritual building. But, as the temple of Solomon was built without the noise of an axe or hammer, or any other tool, [1 Kings 6:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 6.7), so are these brought in a silent manner, [Job 33:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 33.15-16). [Acts 16:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.14), and "fitly framed together for a habitation of God through the Spirit, [Ephesians 2:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.21-22)."

***~~By "coming to Christ" they are gradually built up upon him—~~***

Believers, quickened by Christ, become "living stones," like unto Christ himself: "they live by him," yes, he himself is their life, [Colossians 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.4). Notwithstanding therefore they have of themselves no power, through his quickening Spirit they become voluntary agents; and though it is true that they are "drawn to him by the Father, [John 6:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.44)," yet it is also true, that they "come to him," willingly and with strong desire. And this is the way in which "they are built up a spiritual house:" by "coming to him" they are placed upon him; and by coming to him yet again and again, they derive "more abundant life" from him; they are more and more fitted for the place they occupy; they are more closely knit to all the other parts of this sacred building, and more firmly established on him as their one foundation. It is thus that the fabric itself is enlarged by the constant addition of fresh materials; and thus that "every part of the building grows unto a holy temple in the Lord."

A similar view must yet further be taken of the temple,

***~~III. In its services—~~***

The same persons, who before were represented as the stones of the building, are now, by an easy transition, spoken of as the priests officiating in it.

***~~Believers are "a holy priesthood"—~~***

None could officiate in the material temple but those of the tribe of Levi: but, *in the spiritual temple, all are priests*, whether Jews or Gentiles, male or female: "The chosen generation are also a royal priesthood, [1 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.9);" who are not only entitled, but bound, to transact their own business with God. This honor also they attain by "coming unto Christ:" by him they are "made kings and priests unto God;" and "through him they have boldness to enter into the holiest," and to present themselves before the majesty of Heaven.

***~~Nor shall the sacrifices which they offer be presented in vain—~~***

They come not indeed with the blood of bulls and of goats; but they bring the infinitely more precious blood of Christ. *On account of his atonement, their prayers and praises, their alms and oblations, yes, all their works of righteousness come up with a sweet savor before God, and their persons as well as services find a favorable acceptance in his sight,* [Hebrews 13:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.15-16). Nor though, through the infirmity of their flesh, their offerings be very imperfect, shall they therefore be despised: if only they are presented with a humble and willing mind, God, even under the law, and much more under the Gospel, has promised to accept them, [Leviticus 22:19-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 22.19-23). [2 Corinthians 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.12).

***~~Let us learn from this subject,~~***

***~~1. Our duty—~~***

Whatever be our attainments in the divine life, we have one daily and hourly employment, to be "coming to Christ." By these means we shall be advanced and established; but, if we neglect them, we shall fall and perish. Nor must the opinions of men be of any weight when opposed to this duty: whoever despises him, we must "choose" him; whoever abhors him, we must account him "precious." If the whole universe would combine against him, we must be firm in our adherence to him.

Nor must we rest in cold uninfluential professions of regard. We must devote ourselves to him, while we build upon him; and *present ourselves, and all that we possess, as living sacrifices unto our God and Father*.

***~~2. Our privilege—~~***

Being brought near to God by the blood of Christ, it is our privilege to maintain fellowship with him as our reconciled God. We should banish all doubts about the acceptance of our feeble endeavors; and come, like the high-priest himself, even to his mercy-seat, there to make known our needs, and obtain the blessings we stand in need of. Methinks our state on earth would resemble, in a measure, the state of those in Heaven: we should possess the same humble confidence, the same holy joy: and our sacrifices, inflamed with heavenly fire, should ever be ascending from the altar of a grateful heart, that God may smell a sweet savor, and "rejoice over us to do us good."

Thrice happy those who so walk before him! Let it be the ambition of us all to do so: then shall we indeed be "temples of the Holy Spirit, [1 Corinthians 6:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.19);" we shall "draw near to God, and God will draw near to us;" we shall "dwell in God, and God will dwell in us;" and the communion begun on earth, shall be carried on and perfected in glory!

***~~#2393~~***

***~~THE SECURITY OF THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN CHRIST~~***

**[1 Peter 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.6)**

"For in Scripture it says: See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

The Scriptures universally speak the same language with respect to Christ: in every part *he is represented as the only Savior, and the all-sufficient help of sinful man*. In this respect the Old Testament prepares us for what is contained in the New, and the New reflects light upon the Old; and thus they mutually illustrate and confirm each other. This observation naturally arises from the frequent appeals made by the Apostles to the prophetic writings; and particularly from the manner in which Peter introduces the passage before us: he seems to intimate not only that the prophet had been inspired to declare the same truth, but that this prophecy had been given of God on purpose to prepare the way for the more direct injunctions of the Gospel. His words declare to us,

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

***~~Christ is often spoken of as a foundation, because he supports the spiritual temple of God; but here he is represented as a corner-stone laid by the hands of God himself—~~***

The excellency of the chief corner-stone, which lies also at the foundation, consists in this, that while it supports the building, it also connects the different parts of it together. Now Christ has united together, not only Jews and Gentiles, but men and angels, in one spiritual building: and while they all derive their strength from him, they all feel, through him, a union with each other, [Ephesians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.14); [Ephesians 2:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.20-22). For this purpose "God laid" him in Zion from the beginning; he laid him, I say, in types and prophecies, and declarations, and promises; and he requires all both in Heaven and earth to honor him as the one source of their strength, and the one bond of their union.

***~~In this view he is "elect and precious" in the eyes of God—~~***

God has appointed him to execute this office from all eternity, and determined that there shall be "no other name whereby any shall be saved." And, as qualified for it, as discharging it in every respect, and as saving man in perfect consistency with the honor of the Divine perfections, God esteems him "precious;" He declares that "in his beloved Son He is well-pleased;" and He acquiesces fully in the salvation of all who shall approve of this appointment.

Nor will he be less precious in our eyes, if we consider,

***~~II. The security of those who "believe in him"—~~***

To believe in him, is to feel an entire dependence on him ourselves, and to have such a union with him as produces a correspondent union with all the other parts of his spiritual temple. They who thus believe in him shall never be confounded:

***~~Here—~~***

Much there is in their experience, which might well confound them, and which nothing but their union with him could enable them to support. How could they endure a sense of guilt, or bear up against their indwelling corruptions? How could they sustain the fiery trial of persecution, or stand composed in the near prospects of death? These are things which disconcert and confound others; and drive them like a ship from its moorings. But they have "an anchor both sure and steadfast." They are not agitated, and driven to hasty conclusions, or ill-advised methods of deliverance. Compare the text with the passage from whence it is taken, [Isaiah 28:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 28.16). "Their heart stands firm, trusting in the Lord." "Being justified by faith, they have peace with God." The promise that "sin shall not have dominion over them," encourages their hope. Their present consolations, and future prospects of reward, soften all their trials, and enable them to "glory in tribulations." And, knowing in whom they have believed, the sting of death is taken away, and they are "delivered from their bondage to the fear of death."

***~~Hereafter—~~***

Terrible indeed must be the apprehensions of an unbeliever, when first dismissed from the body and carried into the presence of a holy God; and at the day of judgment how will he stand appalled! But the believer will go as a child into the presence of his Father, with love, and joy, and confidence. He will not be confounded at the glory of the Divine Majesty, because he is washed in the Redeemer's blood, and clothed in his righteousness. Even Mary Magdalen, or the dying thief, know no terror in the presence of their God, because they are "complete in Christ:" it is on this account that they shall have confidence before him at his coming, and great boldness in the day of judgment, [1 John 2:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.28); [1 John 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.17). Nor is this the privilege of a few only, who are strong in faith, but of "all that believe," whether their faith be strong or weak.

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How great is the difference between believers and unbelievers!~~***

The world perhaps may not in some instances discern much difference; but God, who sees the heart, gives this glorious promise to the one, while there is no such promise in all the sacred oracles to the other. Let us then believe on Christ; and make him "all our salvation and all our desire."

***~~2. How unreasonable is the unbelief of sinful men!~~***

God has laid his Son for a chief corner-stone in Zion, and declared him to be precious to himself in that view: why then should he not be "elect and precious" unto us also? Have we found a better foundation, or a surer bond of union? Or can we produce one instance wherein any person that believed in him was finally confounded? O let us consider what confusion will probably seize us here, and certainly hereafter, if we continue to reject him. And let us without delay "flee for refuge to the hope set before us."

***~~#2394~~***

***~~CHRIST PRECIOUS TO BELIEVERS~~***

***~~[1 Peter 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.7)~~***

"Unto you who believe, He is precious!"

There is a great difference between the views of natural and spiritual men. This exists even with respect to things temporal; much more in those which are spiritual and eternal. It appears particularly with respect to Christ. Hence Peter represents him as rejected of some, but chosen by others. This was designed of God, and agreeable to the prophecies; and it justifies the inference drawn from it in the text.

We shall:

***~~I. Confirm this saying of the Apostle, that Christ is precious to believers—~~***

We might suppose that Christ would be precious to all men; but he is not so. Nevertheless he is so to all that truly believe.

***~~The history of the Old Testament affords abundant proof of this—~~***

*Abraham*rejoiced to see his day, though at a distance, [John 8:56](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.56).

*Job*delighted in the thoughts of death as introducing him to his presence, [Job 19:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 19.25-27).

*Moses*esteemed reproach for his sake, [Hebrews 11:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.26).

*David*regarded nothing in earth or Heaven in comparison with him, [Psalm 73:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.25).

*Isaiah*exulted in the prospect of his incarnation, [Isaiah 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 9.6).

All the *prophets*contemplated him as the Messiah, the Savior of the world.

***~~The New Testament Scriptures confirm it—~~***

The *Virgin*, while he was yet in her womb, sang his praises, [Luke 1:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.47).

The *angels*congratulated the shepherds on his incarnation, [Luke 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.10).

The just and devout *Simeon*after seeing him, could depart in peace, [Luke 2:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.29-30).

*John the Baptist*, as the bridegroom's friend, rejoiced in his voice, [John 3:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.29).

How precious was he to that *Mary*who was a sinner, [Luke 7:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.38).

*Paul*counted all as rubbish for the knowledge of him, was willing to be bound, or to die for him, and knew no comfort like the expectation of being with him, [Philippians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.8). [Acts 21:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 21.13). [1 Thessalonians 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.18).

The glorified saints and angels incessantly adore him, [Revelation 5:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.12-13).

The experience of *living saints*accords with that of those who have gone before. There are many:  
to whom he is preciousness itself,  
who account him as the pearl of great price,  
who desire to know more of him,  
who grieve that they cannot love him more,  
who welcome everything that leads to him,  
and who despise all in comparison with him.

The world even wonders at them on account of their attachment to him.

***~~II. Account for the fact, and show why he is so precious to them—~~***

They have reason enough for their attachment:

***~~They love him for his own excellence—~~***

He is infinitely above all created beauty or goodness. Shall they then regard these qualities in the creature, and not in him? Whoever views him by faith, cannot but admire and adore him.

***~~They love him for his suitableness to their necessities—~~***

There is in Christ all which believers can want; nor can they find any other capable of supplying their needs: hence they delight in him as their "all in all."

***~~They love him for the benefits they receive from him—~~***

They have received from him pardon, peace, strength, etc. Can they do otherwise than account him precious?

We may rather wonder why all do not feel the same attachment.

***~~III. Show why this regard for him is found in believers exclusively—~~***

There certainly exists no reason on his part, for he is good to all. But unbelievers cannot love him:

***~~1. Because they have no views of his excellency—~~***

The God of this world has blinded them that they cannot see him, [2 Corinthians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.4). How then would they esteem him, whose excellency they know not? They must of necessity be indifferent to him, as men are to things of little value.

***~~2. Because they feel no need of him—~~***

Christ is valuable only as a remedy, [Isaiah 32:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 32.2); nor can any man desire him as a physician, a fountain, a refuge, unless he feels some disease, some thirst, some danger.

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

All, who have any spiritual discernment, feel a love to Christ. He is beloved of the Father, of angels, and of saints.*None but devils and unbelievers despise him*; and shall any, who do not account him precious, be objects of his regard? Surely his final decision will correspond with that declaration in [1 Samuel 2:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.30).

Let all then believe in him, that he may become precious to them; nor let any be dejected because they cannot delight in him as they wish. *The more we love Jesus, the more shall we lament the coldness of our love.*In a little time all the powers of our souls shall act without control. Then shall we glory in him with unrestrained and unabated ardor!

***~~#2395~~***

***~~THE DIFFERENT STATES OF BELIEVERS AND UNBELIEVERS~~***

***~~[1 Peter 2:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.7-10)~~***

"Therefore, unto you who believe, He is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone, and, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message--which is also what they were destined for. But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

There is a great and manifest difference put between men in respect to the *advantages*they enjoy, and the *endowments*they possess. Some are born to great possessions, while others from their birth experience nothing but poverty and want. Some are blessed with a strength of intellect, that qualifies them for the deepest researches; while others are so limited in their capacities, that they can scarcely comprehend the plainest and simplest things.

A still greater difference obtains in respect to the opportunities which men have for spiritual instruction. As of old, the light of divine truth was confined to one single nation; so, at this present moment, *there is but a small part of the world who hear anything of Christ, and a very small part indeed to whom the Gospel is preached in its purity*. Such being unquestionably the dispensations of God's providence, we must not wonder if a similar exercise of sovereignty appears in the dispensations of his grace.

To draw the precise limits, where human agency concurs with the operations of God's Spirit, or where it resists and frustrates them, is beyond our power; but of this we may be well assured—that all evil is from man; all good is from God. We shall have strong evidence of this in the passage before us; in which we see the difference that exists between different men:

***~~I. In their regard for Christ—~~***

Mankind may be divided into two classes: believers, and unbelievers.

Now of all the things which may serve to distinguish these, there is none more decisive than their different regard to Christ.

***~~To the BELIEVER, Christ is "precious"—~~***

We need not enter into all the grounds of a believer's love to Christ. Suffice it to say, that he feels himself indebted to Christ for all his hopes in this life, and for all his prospects in eternity. He has washed in the fountain of the Redeemer's blood, and has been cleansed by it from all sin.*He has lived by faith in the Son of God, and has received out of his fullness all needful supplies of grace and peace.*Hence he looks upon Christ, not merely as a friend and benefactor, but as a Savior from death and Hell. He esteems him, not only as precious, but as preciousness itself. In comparison with him, all other things are considered as dung and dross! [Philippians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.8).

***~~To the UNBELIEVER, Christ is "a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense"—~~***

Unbelief and disobedience are so nearly allied, that they are, in the Greek language, expressed by the same word. Indeed unbelief is the highest act of disobedience; for "this is God's commandment, that we would believe on the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, [1 John 3:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.23)."

To exercise faith in Christ is the duty of all. He is "the stone which is laid in Zion," and on which we are to build all our hopes. But "the builders themselves, the heads of the Jewish Church, rejected him." And notwithstanding that "he is become the cornerstone," "the disobedient" still reject him. It was foretold that this would be the treatment shown him by the generality [Psalm 118:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 118.22); and the outcome has fully justified the prediction. The grounds indeed on which men reject him, are altered; but their conduct towards him is the same as was observed in the days of old.

The Jews were offended at his base appearance, and his high pretensions; and particularly at his professing to supersede the Mosaic law: and, on these accounts, they crucified him as an impostor.

We on the contrary, profess to honor him as the true Messiah; but are offended at the salvation which he has revealed.*We think it too humiliating in its doctrines, and too strict in its precepts*. We cannot endure to give him all the glory of our salvation. Nor can we submit to walk in those paths of holiness and self-denial which he has trodden before us. On these accounts many reject his Gospel: they cry out against it, as discouraging the practice of good works, as opening the very flood-gates of iniquity, and (as strange as the contradiction is) making the way to Heaven so strait and difficult that no one can walk in it. Thus, instead of building on Christ as the foundation-stone, they make him only "a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense, [Isaiah 8:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.14)."

How far this is to be traced to any antecedent purposes of God, will appear more distinctly, while we mark the difference between them,

***~~II. In their states before God—~~***

"Those who do not believe, stumble at the Word, being disobedient."

The ungodly stumble through their own depravity—but we enjoy our privileges as a chosen generation.

In what manner they stumble at the word, has been already noticed. We must now endeavor to trace their stumbling to its proper causes.

It is certainly, in the first instance, owing to their own "disobedience." Men are filled with pride, and are unwilling to embrace any sentiment that tends to abase them. They are also full of worldly and carnal lusts, which they cannot endure to have mortified and subdued. In short, their desires and their passions are altogether adverse to the Gospel: so that, when the word is preached to them, they instantly set themselves against it. In vain are proofs adduced; in vain are motives urged; in vain are all human efforts to conciliate their regard to Christ: the language of their hearts is, "I have loved strangers, and after them I will go! [Jeremiah 2:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.25)."

The contempt which the Pharisees poured on Christ, on account of his prohibiting the love of money, is traced by the Evangelists to this very source, "'You cannot serve God and money!' The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed Him." [Luke 16:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.14)." And our Lord expressly recommends obedience as the best preparative for receiving the knowledge of his Gospel, "If any man will do God's will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God. [John 7:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.17)."

But, according to the words of the text, it seems as if men's unbelief was to be traced ultimately to the decrees of God respecting them. We cannot however understand them as establishing so awful a doctrine: nay, we cannot think that the doctrine of absolute reprobation can ever be established, while those words remain in the Bible, "As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner! [Ezekiel 33:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.11)." Nevertheless we are not disposed to explain away the words of the text; for they certainly have a very solemn and important meaning, to which it befits us to attend.

God has decreed that those who will not receive the Gospel for the illumination of their minds, shall eventually be blinded by it; that those who are not softened by it, shall be hardened, [Isaiah 6:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.9-10); that they to whom it is not "a savor of life unto life, shall find it a savor of death unto death, [2 Corinthians 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.16)." The Gospel is certainly so constituted, that it shall produce these effects. Christ is "set for the fall, as well as for the rising, of many in Israel, [Luke 2:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.34)." "He is for a sanctuary," to protect and save the humble; but he is also "for a stone of stumbling," yes, "for a trap and a snare, that many (even all that are proud, perverse, and obstinate) may stumble and fall, and be broken, and be snared, [Isaiah 8:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.14-15)."

***~~"But you" (true believers) are exalted to the highest privileges by the Gospel—~~***

The various terms here used were originally intended to mark the privileges of the Jewish nation, [Exodus 19:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 19.6). [Deuteronomy 7:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 7.6); but they are applicable to believers in a higher and more appropriate sense.

Believers are "a chosen generation," they have been "chosen of God from before the foundation of the world, [Ephesians 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.4)." Though the misery of unbelievers is owing, not to any absolute decrees of reprobation, but to their own pride and wickedness, we must not imagine that the happiness of believers is owing to their own inherent goodness: for they have no good qualities which they have not first received from God, 1 Corinthians 4:7; and consequently *their good qualities are the effect, not the cause, of God's kindness to them*. Though therefore we cannot accede to the doctrine of reprobation, we have no doubt whatever on the subject of election; since both by Scripture and experience it is established on the firmest grounds.

Believers are also "a royal priesthood," they are now made both "kings and priests unto God, [Revelation 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.6)." They are chosen by God to reign over their own lusts, and to have the nearest access to him in all holy duties. There is no difference now between Jew and Gentile, or between male and female: but all are permitted to approach unto the mercy-seat of their God, and to offer to him the spiritual sacrifices of prayer and praise.

Moreover, they are "a holy nation, and a people belonging to God." All are united under the same King; all obey the same laws; all participate in the same interests. They are all separated by God, and "set apart for himself:" they are not of the world, though they are in it: they are mere "pilgrims and strangers" here; and are traveling to "a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

All these distinctions they enjoy; and they owe them all to the sovereign grace of God!

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Unbelievers—~~***

You need only to examine your regard for Christ, and you will soon find with which class you are to be numbered. You may easily discover whether Christ is supremely precious to your souls, or whether you are averse to the *doctrines*and *precepts*of his Gospel.

Think with yourselves, what guilt you contract, and to what danger you are exposed, while you remain insensible to all the love of Christ—your guilt is greater than that of the very persons who crucified him, because you sin against greater light, and contradict your most solemn professions. O provoke not God to give you over to judicial blindness; nor make God's richest mercy an occasion of your more aggravated condemnation!

***~~2. Believers—~~***

You see in the latter part of the text how infinitely you are indebted to your God:

Once you were in darkness; now you are "brought into the marvelous light" of his Gospel!"

"Once you were not the people of God; now you are!"

"Once you had not obtained mercy; now you have obtained mercy."

And for what end has God given to make this alteration in your state, and to distinguish you thus from millions, who are still left in the very condition in which you so lately were? Was it not "that you would show forth the praises, yes the virtues too, of him who called you?" Entertain then a befitting sense of your obligations: and endeavor to "render unto the Lord according to the benefits" conferred upon you. Show forth his praises by frequent and devout acknowledgments; and show forth his virtues by following his steps and obeying his commandments.

***~~#2396~~***

***~~SUBJECTION TO CIVIL GOVERNMENT~~***

**[1 Peter 2:13-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.13-17)**

"Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king."

The great duty of a Christian minister is to exalt the Savior and to call men to submit to his government. But we must not imagine that this is neglected, when our minds are led to the consideration of human governments, and the duties we owe to them: for there is a manifest connection between the two subjects; the latter being, in reality, a branch of the former.

We cannot truly submit to Christ, unless we yield obedience to all his laws—to those which relate to our conduct in civil life, as well as those which are given to regulate the inmost workings of our souls towards God. The words which I have read will lead me to show you,

***~~I. Our duty in relation to civil government—~~***

***~~Civil government is ordained by God—~~***

"Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men." In some countries absolute monarchy is established: in our own, a limited monarchy. In some, there are republics; in others, the power is vested in an aristocracy. In fixing the precise mode in which the affairs of any nation shall be administered, the agency of man has been altogether employed: God having never interposed by an authoritative mandate from Heaven, except in the case of the Jewish people.

The history of our own nation sufficiently informs us, that the changes which take place in human governments are the result of human deliberation, or of human force. Yet, in its original appointment, civil government proceeds from God himself. He has ordained that man shall not be left in the state of the brute creation, every one independent of his fellow, and every one at liberty to follow the bent of his own inclinations, without any regard to the welfare of others: but that power shall be vested in some for the good of the community; and that every one shall be responsible to that power for his own conduct, as far as the welfare of the community is concerned. Paul expressly tells us, that "there is no power, but of God; and that the powers that be, are ordained by God, [Romans 13:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 13.1)."

***~~To it we are to submit to Civil government, "for the Lord's sake"—~~***

Power must, of course, be delegated to a great variety of persons, and in different degrees: and to it, in whoever it is vested, or in whatever degree, we are to yield that measure of submission which the laws require. We owe allegiance, primarily, "to the king, as supreme;" and, subordinately, to all other classes of magistrates or governors, who are appointed by him for the exercise of his authority in their respective jurisdictions. The obedience which we are to pay may be rendered more easy, or more difficult, by the personal character of him who exacts it: but it is due, *not to the man, but to the office*; and therefore it must be paid, even though the man who executes the office may be far from deserving the homage he requires.

If only we recollect that Nero was the governor of the Roman empire at the time that the Apostle wrote his epistle to the Church at Rome; and that towards him, notwithstanding his great cruelty and his bitter persecution of all who bore the Christian name, the Apostle required all to show the utmost reverence and submission; we shall see that there is no room for any person to withhold allegiance from the reigning monarch on account of anything that there may be offensive in his personal character.

The words of the Apostle are most decisive on this point: "[Romans 13:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 13.1-2) Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority," even though it be exercised by a very Nero, "is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves, [Romans 13:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 13.1-2)."

Nor does this observation extend to the supreme governor alone; but to all, according to the measure of authority that is vested in them: and it is not only from fear of their displeasure that we are to render them this homage, but "for conscience' sake, [Romans 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 13.5)," or, as my text expresses it, "for the Lord's sake."

How "the Lord" is interested in our performance of this duty, will appear, while we consider,

***~~II. The grounds and reasons of it—~~***

We are bound to yield submission to civil government because of:

***~~1. Civil government is altogether of God's appointment—~~***

The institution of government is from him, as has already been shown. Moreover, the power that is exercised by earthly governors is God's authority delegated to men, who are constituted his viceregents upon earth. It is not man therefore, but God, whom we are called to obey: it is God, I say, in the person of the civil magistrate, [Numbers 16:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 16.11). [1 Samuel 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 8.7) with [Romans 13:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 13.4). We are to "submit" ourselves to man, "for so is the will of God:" and, in rendering to man the service that is due, we are to consider ourselves, not as the servants of men, but "as the servants of God."

What need we further than this, to evince the indispensable necessity of submitting to civil government, and of obeying implicitly the laws which are enacted by the constituted authorities of the realm? If we are to obey God in the duties of the first table, so are we in those of the second also: and if, "for the Lord's sake," we are to submit ourselves to the religious ordinances of God, so are we, with equal readiness, for his sake, to submit ourselves to every civil ordinance of man.

***~~2. Civil government is conducive to the public welfare—~~***

Though authority may not always be exerted for the best ends, it is committed to men solely with a view to the public good. It is ordained for the restraining and "punishing of evil-doers," and for the protection and "benefit of those who do right." I need not occupy your time with showing how great a mercy it is to live under an equitable and active magistracy, who are engaged in enforcing the observance of the laws.

Let us suppose only that the law were suspended through the land for the space of three days, and that every one were left to follow the bent of his own will without fear and without restraint: what misery, even during that short space of time, would pervade the whole kingdom! What scores of rapine, and violence, and lust, and cruelty, would pervade the whole country! An awful picture of this state, when there was no king in Israel, "but every one did that which was right in his own eyes," may be seen in [Judges 17:5-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 17.5-10); [Judges 19:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 19.1-2); [Judges 19:22-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 19.22-30); [Judges 20:1-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 20.1-48); [Judges 21:1-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 21.1-25). A juster picture cannot be conceived.

Who would not be crying out for the restoration of legitimate authority, and bless God the very moment that he was permitted once more to experience the benefits of civil government? Who would not then feel happy in discharging his duty to that government, by a just payment of tax, for the support of the legitimate authorities, and of the public weal? Then would we need no arguments to prove, that partial restraint is universal liberty; and that *true freedom can be found only in such an exercise of our powers, as will consist with the freedom and happiness of all around us.*

***~~3. Civil government has a tendency to recommend religion—~~***

God has special respect to this; as we would have also: "It is His will" that we would fulfill this duty, "that by well-doing we may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men." The Jews were generally considered, and with great justice too, as averse to civil government, especially as maintained by heathen. They had received a civil code from God himself: and they could not endure that anything would be withdrawn from it, or added to it. They had also been under a Theocracy, [1 Samuel 12:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 12.12); even their kings being, as subordinate magistrates, appointed by him. They judged, therefore, that all other authority was an usurpation; and they were ready at all times, if possible, to throw off a foreign yoke. This being the known character of the Jews, (though it was in direct opposition to the command which God himself had given them, to "seek the peace of the cities to which they would be carried captive, and to pray for them, [Jeremiah 29:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 29.7),") it was supposed that the same character attached to them after they became Christians, and that, in fact, it was the habit of the whole Christian world.

It was in vain that Christians denied this imputation: their enemies were ignorant, willfully ignorant, of their principles; and continued, in spite of all remonstrances, to load them with this reproach. 'Now,' says the Apostle, 'it is the will of God that you would cut off all occasion for this calumny; and though you cannot hope to convince "ignorant" people, who do not know, and "foolish" people, who will not learn—yet you may, "by well-doing, put them to silence;" and so "muzzle" their ignorance and folly, that they may not be able to open their mouths against you.'

This should be an object near to the heart of all the Lord's people; and they would labor to accomplish it, "for the Lord's sake."

After viewing your duty in this light, you will be prepared to consider,

***~~III. The manner in which your duty to civil government should be performed—~~***

It should be performed:

***~~1. With integrity of mind, as unto the Lord—~~***

Christians were "free," and had a right to assert their freedom. But, from what were they free? From obedience to civil magistrates? From those bonds which hold all society together? No! God forbid. They are, in these respects, under the same restraints as all other people under Heaven.

But, as Christians, they were free from the yoke of bondage, to which they had been subject in their Jewish state; and the command of God to them was, "Stand fast in the liberty with which Christ has made you free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage, [Galatians 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.1)."

In like manner, those who had been converted from heathenism were freed from the various superstitions which, under their former state, they had been bound to observe: and though they would be under heathen governors—yet were they absolved from all allegiance to them in this respect, being now placed under the higher authority of God himself.

*Daniel*, and the Hebrew Youths had done well in resisting the authority that would have kept them from honoring the true God, or have compelled them to transfer his honor to any created object.

The *Apostles*, when forbidden to preach in the name of Jesus, did well in answering, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you, more than unto God, you judge, [Acts 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.19)."

The same liberty is transmitted to us also. That Christians are free from guilt and condemnation, and from the power of sin, is all true; but nothing to the present purpose; and from whatever quarter a command may come, to omit what God enjoins, or to do what he forbids, our answer must be, "We ought to obey God rather than men! [Acts 5:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.29)." But we must be careful not to make this liberty of ours "a cloak for wickedness," and, under pretense of asserting our Christian liberty, to withhold from our civil governors that respect which is their due.

This is an observation of vast importance. There is in the human mind a restlessness and impatience of control. There is also a proneness to enlarge or contract the bounds of duty, and the consequent demands of conscience, according as interest or inclination may bias our minds. Who does not see this as exhibited in others? And who has not reason to suspect this, as harbored in himself?

I am well aware that this is a delicate subject, and especially when promulgated among persons who live under a free constitution, and have been taught to venerate the very name of *liberty*with an almost idolatrous regard. But the caution is the more necessary, on that very account: for, in proportion as we are tenacious for liberty, we are in danger of transgressing the bounds which God has prescribed, and of deluding ourselves with an idea, that we are only exercising the rights of British subjects, when we are, in fact, indulging a restless and factious spirit; a spirit, which, if it were opposed to us, we ourselves would be the foremost to condemn. For *there are no persons more ready to cry out against the exercise of liberty in others, than those who are most clamorous for the maintenance of it in themselves.*

Let the Apostle's caution, then, be well received, and duly attended to. We are all concerned to "know what spirit we are of," and to do that only which God himself will approve: and let me not be thought to be advocating the cause of a party, while I declare what is really and truly the mind of God.*We are greatly exposed to self-deception in this matter*. And we have seen it prevailing, to a very awful extent, in this kingdom, not only at the time of the French revolution, but at more recent periods. We have seen religious persons uniting with those who were openly regardless both of God and man, and with an unhallowed zeal countenancing the most lawless proceedings. Surely, if the true character of God's people is that they are "the quiet in the land, [Psalm 35:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 35.20)," then these persons would do well to consider whether they are not carried by a party-spirit beyond what Christ or his Apostles ever practiced, or ever sanctioned, and whether they would not honor their profession more by attending to the caution given them in my text. I say this, because religion has of late been grievously scandalized by the departure of multitudes from Christian duty in this particular.

***~~2. With a harmonious attention to all other duties—~~***

In all Christian duties there is a perfect harmony: no one of them is in any degree opposed to any other. In the pursuits of earthly men, it is necessary to check one propensity, in order to indulge another. A man who is ambitious, and yet covetous, must sacrifice, in a measure, his love either of honor or of wealth; because the line he must pursue in the prosecution of the one, must impede him in the pursuit of the other. But the Christian, in the performance of his duties, finds no such counteracting influence: he may serve God in the utmost perfection, and yet not be defective in any duty which he owes to man.

Let no duty then be neglected: but, as all are compatible with submission to civil government, so, if performed in their proper manner, they will all contribute to advance, rather than obstruct, the best possible execution of our social obligations.

"Show proper respect to everyone." There is no man who does not claim at our hands a measure of respect. Those who excel in wisdom and goodness are doubtless entitled to a larger share. But even the most unworthy object is not to be despised; forasmuch as he was "made after the similitude of God, [James 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.9)," and may, for anything that we know, become a child of God, and an heir of his eternal glory.

Yet, doubtless, we must with a more especial affection "love the brotherhood." The saints, to whatever nation or sect they belong, ought to be dear to us: for with God there is no respect of persons: there is neither Jew, nor Greek, Barbarian, Scythian, bond, nor free; but all are regarded as one in Christ, Jesus [Galatians 3:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.28). [Colossians 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.11)." They are all members of his mystical body, yes, "members one of another [1 Corinthians 12:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 12.12). [Ephesians 4:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.25);" and though we are to "do good unto all men," there is a special obligation upon us to do good unto "them that are of the household of faith, [Galatians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.10)." Towards the world we should feel a love of benevolence: but towards the saints, a love of delight. We are united to them in the closest bonds; and would "love them with a pure heart, fervently" and intensely, [1 Peter 1:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.22).

We must "fear God" also. Our regards must not he confined to man: they must soar upwards to God; and be fixed on him supremely. We must love man; but not fear him: whereas God must be the object both of love and fear. Nothing under Heaven must induce us to displease him. All the creatures in the universe are to be withstood, if they enjoin what is contrary to his revealed will: for his commands are of paramount obligation; and life itself must be sacrificed rather than the least of them be violated by us. If, however, so painful a necessity arises as that of disobedience to an earthly governor, we must show clearly, in the whole of our conduct, that our opposition is the offspring, not of a contentious mind, but of a pious regard to superior authority.

Together with all this, we must "honor the king." Whatever is good in him, we must delight to applaud: and, if there be anything in him of human infirmity, we must readily cast a veil over it, and make due allowance for the temptations with which he is surrounded, and for the weaknesses of our common nature. *Viewing him as God's representative*, we must honor him in our hearts; and be ready to shield him against every adversary, and to concur with him in all his endeavors for the welfare of his people. If he appears disposed to exceed the powers which are assigned to him by law, we are not to indulge in strains of querulous invective: for even "against the devil himself would not Michael bring a railing accusation; but temperately said, The Lord rebuke you, Jude verse 8, 9."

And, if an archangel so restrained the emotions of his mind, much more should we, who are expressly enjoined "not to despise dominion, or to speak evil of dignities." Whatever methods of redress the constitution prescribes, we may certainly use: but we would use them, not in a spirit of clamourous opposition, but in the spirit of Him, "who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, threatened not; but committed himself to him who judges righteously, [1 Peter 2:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.23)."

In a word, we are to maintain a harmonious regard to all our duties; compromising none, forgetting none. We must be conscientiously intent on all, "rendering unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things which are God's, [Matthew 22:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 22.21)."

***~~I cannot close this subject better than by desiring you all devoutly to unite with me in the following prayer—~~***

"Almighty God, whose kingdom is everlasting, and power infinite, have mercy upon the whole Church; and so rule the heart of your chosen servant, our king and governor, that he, knowing whose minister he is, may above all things seek your honor and glory: and that we, and all his subjects, duly considering whose authority he has, may faithfully serve, honor, and obey him, in you, and for you, according to your blessed word and ordinance, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

***~~#2397~~***

***~~HOW TO BEAR INJURIES~~***

***~~[1 Peter 2:19-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.19-23)~~***

"For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly."

*The practical nature of the Gospel meets us through every part of the New Testament, from the beginning to the end.*Our Lord's sermon on the mount was wholly of this character; as are also his addresses to the seven Churches of Asia, in the book of Revelation. Nor are the epistles, which were written by different Apostles, at all different in their scope and tendency: they do indeed insist more on *doctrines*: but yet *the preceptive parts of them are singularly minute and full; and are distinctly addressed to persons in every situation and relation of life*. The passage before us is a peculiar address to servants, to show them how they are to conduct themselves towards their masters, who shall be embittered against them for embracing the Gospel of Christ.

But the Apostle did not intend this instruction to be limited to servants; for, in the close of the chapter, he extends it to all, who "like sheep have gone astray, but are now returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of their souls."

His words suggest,

***~~I. A precept for our observance—~~***

***~~It is here taken for granted that true Christians in every age will be persecuted for righteousness' sake—~~***

And the whole history of mankind fully justifies this assumption: for from the time of Abel to the present hour it has been verified. The lovers of darkness hate the light; and will endeavor, when it lies in their power, to extinguish it, [John 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.19). The whole life of David tends to illustrate this: "They that render evil for good are mine adversaries," says he, "because I follow the thing that is good, [Psalm 38:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 38.20)."

And what shall I say of him who was greater than David, even the Son of God himself? Surely his wisdom precluded a possibility of any fault being found with him; while his goodness suppressed, in every bosom, a disposition to find fault. But this was by no means the case: on the contrary, in proportion to his superiority above all the sons of men, was the inveteracy of the carnal mind against him. Can we, then, hope to escape their malignity? No, "The disciple cannot be above his Master, or the servant above his Lord: if they have hated him, they will hate us also, [Matthew 10:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.24). [John 15:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.18);" we, like him, must have our cross to bear, [Luke 14:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.26-27); and "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution, [2 Timothy 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.12)."

***~~But, whatever be our trials, and however undeserved, we must "take them patiently"—~~***

"We are called to them" by God himself; who has wisely and graciously "appointed, [1 Thessalonians 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 3.3)," that, by means of them, our graces would be both elicited and improved, and our fidelity to him be placed beyond a doubt. *He has ordained that by means of these trials, glory shall accrue to him, and everlasting good to our own souls.*They give to us an opportunity of showing how highly we regard his favor, when, for his sake, we are willing to endure all that men or devils can inflict upon us. They display, at the same time, the power of his grace, which can uphold us under such circumstances; and the excellency of his religion, which shines so bright in contrast with the spirit and conduct of our ungodly persecutors. They are the means, too, of augmenting our happiness in the eternal world; since there is not a sacrifice which we are called to make, or a suffering to endure, which shall not be richly recompensed at the resurrection of the just, [1 Peter 4:12-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.12-16).

If it is said, that it is an intolerable hardship to suffer, when we have given no occasion whatever for man's displeasure; I answer, your innocence would operate rather to lighten, than to aggravate, your affliction; since it administers sweet consolation to your own soul, and serves as a testimony in your behalf before God. If your punishment were merited, you would have no ground for approbation, either before God, or in your own minds, for submitting patiently to it: but, if you suffer patiently for well-doing, you evince a truly gracious disposition, and render an acceptable service to your God.

This, then, we are to consider as a precept given to us, under whatever injuries we may be called to sustain: we must "possess our souls in patience, [Luke 21:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 21.19);" and "let patience have its perfect work, that we may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing, [James 1:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.3-4)."

To this precept the Apostle adds,

***~~II. An example for our imitation—~~***

***~~Not one of all mankind was ever so blameless as our Lord Jesus Christ—~~***

"In him was no sin, [1 John 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.5);" "nor was any deceit found in his mouth, [Isaiah 53:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.9)." He appealed even to his bitterest enemies, "which of you convinces me of sin, [John 8:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.46)." With all the disposition to incriminate him that the most inveterate malignity could cherish, his accusers were all put to shame, and his judge proclaimed his innocence, [Luke 23:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.4).

***~~Yet, never was any man so evil treated as he—~~***

Scarcely was he come into the world, before his life was sought; and for the sake of securing, at all events, his destruction, thousands of poor innocents were slain. During the four years of his ministry, there was nothing too malignant for his enemies to say concerning him: "He was a deceiver, [Matthew 27:63](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.63);" He was "a devil, and was mad, [John 7:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.20); [John 8:48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.48); [John 10:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.20)." The efforts made to take away his life were continual: and the more good works he did, the fiercer was men's rage against him: nor did his enemies rest, until they had attained their end, and nailed him to the accursed tree!

***~~But how did he conduct himself under his trials?~~***

Not so much as one hasty word escaped him; nor one angry feeling betrayed itself in him: "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly." Truly "he was as a lamb led to the slaughter; and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth, [Isaiah 53:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.7)."

In all this, he was an *example*to us: "He suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we would follow his steps." He submitted to all those indignities, on purpose that he might show us how to act under similar trials: and God permits us to be brought, in some small degree, into similar circumstances, on purpose that we may "be conformed to his image, [Romans 8:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.29)," and be "made perfect in the very same way" that he was, [Hebrews 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.10); [Hebrews 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.8), and enter into glory by the very same path, 1 Peter 4:19.

To this, then, must our minds be made up: we must be willing to endure sufferings for well-doing; to submit to them, however great they are, with unruffled patience; and to "commit ourselves to God in well-doing, as into the hands of a faithful Creator, [Hebrews 12:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.1-2)."

***~~Let us learn then from hence:~~***

***~~1. How we are to regard the Lord Jesus Christ—~~***

Many who profess to believe, and even to preach, the Gospel, confine their views of Christ almost exclusively to him as dying for our sins, or as reigning in glory to carry on and perfect his work in our behalf. This, doubtless, is a most important view of him—it is the very foundation of all our hopes. Yet is it by no means a complete view: and those who confine themselves to it are greatly deceived: and, whether willingly or not, they grievously dishonor him. He must be regarded as an example: nor is he less glorious in that view, than in any other. Nay, if we omit to regard him in that light, we suffer an irreparable loss.

Would we know what treatment we must expect, if we will faithfully serve our God? Look at him. Not all the wisdom of his lips, nor all the blamelessness of his deportment, nor all the wonders which he wrought, could avert from Him the hatred, the contempt, the cruelty, of an ungodly world. Who then are we, that we would hope to escape these things?

Would we know how to conduct ourselves under sufferings inflicted on us for righteousness' sake? Look at him. Behold his meekness, his patience, his long-suffering, and forbearance; yes, and hear him praying for his very murderers! And then say, whether this be not the spirit that befits you.

Would we know the outcome of such a life? Look at him. See him seated at the right hand of God, and all his enemies become his footstool. Such shall be the end of all who tread in his steps: "having suffered with him, they shall surely reign with him! [2 Timothy 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.12)."

Take him then, beloved, as your example; and be content to "suffer with him, that you may also be glorified together, [Romans 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.17)."

***~~2. How we are to approve ourselves as his faithful servants—~~***

If we are to bear injuries from others, we must, beyond all doubt, be "good and gentle" ourselves, "showing all meekness to all men," and, however injured by others, we must endure unto the end. We must not draw back through fear of sufferings; or faint under them, when they are inflicted on us. If we enlist under the banners of an earthly prince, we expect to fight his battles: we do not, when we hear of an enemy, desert and hide ourselves. We do not, when we meet him in the field, lay down our arms. We rather gird ourselves for the fight, and say, 'Now is the time for me to display my zeal in the cause I have espoused, and my fidelity to him whom I have engaged to serve.'

Thus, then, must you do in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. You must not be ashamed of wearing, if I may so speak, his uniform; and of showing, in the face of the whole universe, on whose side you are.

Yet, remember that it is with his armor only that you must go forth to the battle. You must "be armed with righteousness on the right hand and on the left"—your breast-plate, in particular, must be of that material. "Your helmet must be the hope of salvation;" and your sword, "the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, [Ephesians 6:14-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.14-17)." It was "by death that the Lord Jesus Christ overcame death, [Hebrews 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.14);" and it is "by patiently enduring, that you also must obtain the promise of an eternal inheritance, [Hebrews 6:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.15)." Keep, then, your eyes fixed on the "Captain of your salvation;" and, "being faithful unto death, you shall receive the crown of life at his hands! [Revelation 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.10)."

***~~#2398~~***

***~~THE VICARIOUS SACRIFICE OF CHRIST~~***

***~~[1 Peter 2:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.24)~~***

"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed."

An attentive reader of the New Testament cannot but have observed, that there is one subject in particular to which the Apostles frequently recur, and on which they delight pre-eminently to dwell: and that is, the great work of redemption. Paul scarcely ever has occasion to mention the name of Christ, but he digresses from his main subject, to indulge the feelings of his heart in expatiating upon the glory and excellency of his Divine Master.

It is the same with the Apostle Peter. He has been speaking to servants; and instructing them to bear with meekness and patience any injuries that may be inflicted on them for the Gospel's sake: and he has proposed to them the example of the Lord Jesus Christ, whose patience, under the most painful sufferings, was altogether unmoved and inexhaustible. But he could not be satisfied with the bare recital of the Savior's excellence. Having touched on the subject, he must enlarge upon it, and not leave it until he has more fully declared the greatness of our obligations to him. Yet this digression was not by any means irrelevant to his purpose. It had a manifest bearing upon his main subject; and was, in that view, capable of the richest improvement.

In opening to you his words, I will,

***~~I. Consider the work of redemption, as here set forth—~~***

And, that we may enter the more fully into it, let us distinctly show:

***~~1. Who is the person here spoken of—~~***

He was a man: for what he did, he did "in his own body." But was he a mere man? No! he was God as well as man, even "Emmanuel, God with us, [Matthew 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 1.23)." He was "Jehovah's Fellow, [Zechariah 13:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 13.7);" "the Mighty God, [Isaiah 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 9.6);" "God over all, blessed for evermore, [Romans 9:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.5)." He it was, "who, being in the form of God, and thinking it not robbery to be equal with God—yet made himself of no reputation, and took on him the form of a servant; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, [Philippians 2:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.6-8)."

***~~2. What he did for us—~~***

"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree." What this imports, will be understood by referring to the rites by which it was shadowed forth. Under the law, sacrifices were offered. The victims were beasts: to them were transferred, by the imposition of hands, the sins of the offender: in the offender's stead they died; their flesh was consumed upon the altar: and, through the sacrifice thus offered, the sins of the offerer were forgiven.

But Jesus, who came down from Heaven to redeem us, had no other offering to make but his own body: on him, therefore, our sins were laid: and the cross was, as it were, the altar on which he was placed; and the fire of God's wrath, the flame with which he was consumed.

Stupendous mystery! But "it is a true saying, and worthy of all acceptance."

***~~3. For what end he did it—~~***

Doubtless he did it, in the first place, to effect our reconciliation with God; as Peter says, in the very next chapter, "He died, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, [1 Peter 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.18)." But he had also a further end in view; namely, to destroy in us the power of sin; and to restore us to that life of righteousness which is indispensable to our happiness, both in this world, and in the world to come. In truth, if this were not effected, it would be to little purpose that an atonement had been made for sin: for as long as sin retained its dominion over us, we must of necessity have a very Hell within us: nor would Heaven itself be any source of blessedness to us, for lack of a disposition suited to it, and a capacity to enjoy it.

***~~4. What is already the outcome of it to every believing soul—~~***

"By his stripes" every believing soul "is healed." The whole *elect world*was virtually healed in him, as soon as ever his sacrifice was offered; even as a debtor is absolved, the very moment that his debt is discharged; or a captive is liberated, the very instant that the redemption price is paid for him. But really, and in fact, our souls are healed, the very instant we believe in Christ: "our sins are blotted out as a morning cloud," and are "put away from us as far as the east is from the west;" "nor shall they be remembered against us any more forever! [Hebrews 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.12)."

A principle of grace, too, is infused into the soul, just as the cruse of salt was into the fountain by Elisha the prophet, [2 Kings 2:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 2.19-22); and by it are its deadly qualities corrected; so that whatever proceeds from it in the future is, comparatively at least, healthful: the Holy Spirit in him is "a well of water, springing up unto everlasting life, [John 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.14)."

That we may not lose sight of the objects for which this mystery is here adduced, we shall,

***~~II. Improve it in the precise view in which the Apostle intended it to be applied—~~***

We must bear in mind, that he is speaking to servants, and exhorting them to take patiently whatever injuries they may be called to sustain for righteousness' sake. For their direction and encouragement, he proposes to them the example of our Lord Jesus Christ: and, not content with specifying his conduct under the most cruel injuries, he suggests the ulterior ends of his sufferings, and the benefits which we derive from them; intending thereby to fix our attention on that mysterious subject:

***~~1. As a balm for all our wounds—~~***

Be it so; we are suffering wrongfully, and because we endeavor to maintain a good conscience towards God. But what are our sufferings, when compared with those which our blessed Lord endured for us? Hear the revilings that were cast on him: "Don't we rightly say that you have a devil, and are mad, [John 7:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.20); [John 8:48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.48); [John 10:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.20). Nothing less than this would sufficiently express their contempt for him."

Behold the sufferings inflicted on him! Go into the hall of Pilate; and there see the thorns driven into his temples, and his sacred body torn with scourges, "the ploughers ploughing on his back, and making long their furrows, [Psalm 129:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 129.3)."

Behold his meekness and resignation; and will not you be ashamed to complain? Will you not rather take up your cross with cheerfulness; and "rejoice that you are counted worthy to partake of his sufferings, and be conformed to him, [1 Peter 4:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.12-13)." If *he*submitted to "stripes, that *you*might be healed," will not you welcome them, if by any means "he may be glorified, [1 Peter 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.14)." Surely, if you reflect aright on this subject, you will regard the sacrifice even of life itself as a small matter, or rather as a ground for thankfulness, [Philippians 2:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.17-18), and for thankfulness to God, who has conferred upon you that high honor for Jesus' sake, [Philippians 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.29).

***~~2. As an incentive to every duty—~~***

What shall "constrain you, [2 Corinthians 5:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.14-15)," if this does not? Or what other motive can you wish for, than that which this stupendous mystery affords? Will you hesitate to forego anything for Him who gave up all the glory of Heaven for you? Or to endure anything for Him, who endured the penalties of God's broken law, and "became a curse for you?" Methinks, the more arduous the duty is, the more eager you will be to perform it; and the more self-denying your labors are, the more will you account yourselves honored in being called to sustain them. Nothing will be any obstacle to you, if only his will may be done by you, and his glory be advanced, [Acts 20:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.24).

***~~3. As a pattern of every grace—~~***

In all that Jesus did, he intended "to set an example for you, that you would follow his steps." Mark his steps, then, from the cradle to the grave. Mark him, especially under those peculiar circumstances referred to in my text. See how he held fast his integrity, amidst the fiercest opposition. You do the same: nor let all that either men or devils can effect, ever divert you from "well-doing;" or cause you to violate, in the slightest degree, the dictates of your "conscience before God."

Mark what returns he made to his persecutors: never, for a moment, did he render evil for evil; or cease to seek, to the uttermost, the welfare of his very murderers, praying to his "Father to forgive them." Let this be your invariable line of conduct also, "blessing them who curse you, and praying for those who despitefully use you, and persecute you, [Matthew 5:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.44)."

There is no grace which you may not see exercised by him, during his last hours, in the highest possible perfection. Set him then before you, under all those circumstances; and endeavor to "walk in all things as he walked." So will you have an evidence that you are his, and that your hope in him is well founded; seeing that "you have the same mind that was in him," and "purify yourselves even as he was pure, [1 John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.3)."

***~~#2399~~***

***~~THE NATURE OF TRUE CONVERSION STATED~~***

***~~[1 Peter 2:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.25)~~***

"For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls."

*Nothing so reconciles the Christian to sufferings, or so quickens him to exertions, as a recollection of the mercies he has experienced at the Lord's hands.* The Apostle is speaking here to servants, who were likely to meet with cruel and oppressive usage from their masters on account of their holy profession. To encourage them to a meek submission to their trials, he reminds them of the example which the Lord Jesus Christ had set for them, when, for the redemption of their souls, he had endured all the agonies of crucifixion; and of the exceedingly rich mercy which they had experienced, in having been brought to the knowledge of Christ, and to the enjoyment of his salvation.

"They were healed:" they were healed "through the stripes inflicted on their Divine Master;" who was now "the Shepherd and Guardian," as he had been the Redeemer and Savior, of their souls. *Enjoying then such benefits through the super-abounding grace of Christ, they ought willingly and cheerfully to endure for him whatever, in his providence, he might permit to be inflicted on them.*

This appears to be the scope of the passage before us: in discoursing upon which, I shall have occasion to consider,

***~~I. Our state by nature—~~***

All of us in our unconverted state have been "as sheep going astray." The Prophet Isaiah, whose words the Apostle cites, declares this to have been the condition of all without exception: "All we like sheep have gone astray! [Isaiah 53:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.6)." In respect of folly, we have resembled the silly sheep; which wanders it knows not where, and exposes itself to dangers, from which, by continuing in the fold, it might have been exempt. In respect of criminality, our conduct justly subjects us to blame, from which the senseless animal is free.

***~~1. Our departure from God has been willful, without any just reason—~~***

The mind of every unregenerate man is alienated from God: he hates his law: he is averse to his yoke: "he says to God, Depart from me; I desire not the knowledge of your ways." All indeed do not choose the same path; but, as the prophet says, they "go every one to his own way:" one in a way of open profaneness; another in a way of self-righteous formality. But in this all are agreed, that they listen not to the voice of the good Shepherd, nor walk in the footsteps of his flock.

And now, I would ask: What reason have they for this? "Has God been a wilderness to them? a land of darkness? Why have they said, We are lords: we will come no more unto you, [Jeremiah 2:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.31)." The true reason of our departure from him has been, that we have "not liked to retain him in our knowledge, [Romans 1:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.28);" on the contrary, the notices which we have had of his power and grace "we have imprisoned in unrighteousness, [Romans 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.18);" and actually "knowing that those who did such things were worthy of death, we have both done them, and had pleasure in those who did them," choosing them as our friends and daily companions, [Romans 1:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.32).

***~~2. Our departure from God has been habitual, without one serious effort to return to him—~~***

The sheep in its wandering state betrays to all its disquietude; and if it knew which way to go, it would gladly return to the fold that it has left. But the unconverted man goes farther and farther from his God, without so much as a desire to return: or if a desire occasionally arises in his mind, it is so weak and so transient, as to produce no permanent effect. If a sense of guilt and danger obtrudes itself upon him, he strives to silence the conviction, and to divert the thought from his mind. If urged to return to the fold of Christ, he replies, "No! I have loved strangers: and after them I will go! [Jeremiah 2:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.25)." This is their way, from the first moment that they begin to act, [Jeremiah 22:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 22.21); and in this they persist, until the good Shepherd, of his own grace and mercy, searches them out, and brings them back to his fold.

Then takes place the change which is described in my text, and which leads me to set before you,

***~~II. Our state by grace—~~***

"We have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls!"

***~~1. We return to the Lord Jesus Christ as our Owner—~~***

By grace we are taught, what in an unconverted state we little consider, that the Lord Jesus Christ is "that good Shepherd who has laid down his life for his *sheep*, [John 10:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.15)." This thought, coming with power to the soul, has a constraining influence: it fills us with wonder and admiration at the love of Christ; and at the same time with grief, on account of our having forsaken such a Shepherd. Now we are perfectly amazed at our own ingratitude: and no terms are sufficiently strong whereby to express our self-loathing and self-abhorrence. Aware now that "we have been bought with a price," even with the precious blood of the Lord Jesus, we are convinced that "we are not our own," but his; and consequently, that we are bound to "glorify him with our body and our spirit, which are his." Under this conviction we return to him, and give ourselves up to him as "his purchased possession."

***~~2. We return to the Lord Jesus Christ as our Provider—~~***

*When once Divine grace has begun to operate effectually on our hearts, we see how we have been all our days feeding on the husks of swine, while we deserted the pastures in which it was our privilege to feed.* But no longer can we be satisfied with such things: Now we desire that better food, which the Lord Jesus Christ has provided for us; and desire to be led into those "pastures, where he makes his flock to lie down at noon." Now we begin to understand what is meant by "eating the flesh of Christ and drinking his blood;" and we find "his flesh to be food indeed, and his blood to be drink indeed;" and the promises, which we once despised, are "sweeter to us than honey or the honey-comb."

***~~3. We return to the Lord Jesus Christ as our Protector—~~***

Now we tremble at the thought of the dangers to which we have been exposed: nor can we rest without imploring the protection of our good Shepherd, to deliver us from that roaring lion that seeks to devour us. No longer can we venture ourselves at a distance from him: we feel that we are unable in ourselves to cope with the feeblest enemy: and we "cast all our care on Him who cares for us."

***~~4. We return to the Lord Jesus Christ as our Governor—~~***

To hear the voice of our good Shepherd is now our delight. Wherever he calls, we follow.

If we are erring in anything, a word from him reclaims us.

Wherever he calls, we go.

Whatever he forbids, we shun.

Whatever he commands, we do.

The *temptations*which once allured us, have now in a great measure lost their power; and the *terrors*that alarmed us, have lost their influence. *What will You have me to do?* is now our one inquiry: and, having ascertained that, we are satisfied; nor can all the powers of earth and Hell divert us from our purpose to obey his will.

Such is the change which takes place in conversion. We do not say that it is perfected in the first moment; nor that it is ever so perfect, but that it admits of increase. In respect of parts, a babe is perfect as a man; though every part admits of growth. So it is in the new man. All these things are found in him, though imperfect as to their degree.

***~~Contemplate then this change,~~***

***~~1. For the satisfying of your own minds—~~***

We cannot conceive of any figure better calculated to illustrate the conversion of a soul, than this. The state of a wandering sheep is known to all: the poor rustic that attends the sheep has as perfect an idea of its needs and dangers, as the most enlightened philosopher can have; and can apprehend as well the comparative felicity of those who are within the fold, watched over, and provided for, by a tender and faithful shepherd.

Nor is there any difficulty in transferring these ideas to the state of a soul before, and after, its conversion.

Consider then whether *you*are conscious of having experienced such a change? I will admit indeed that there are some who are sanctified, as it were, from a young age, and whose transition from a natural to a spiritual state is not so distinctly marked. But these are very few: and in them the image of a sheep obedient to its shepherd's voice, is as just, as in any other person whatever.

The great mass of mankind have been far off from God; and they, *when converted, are brought near unto him, as their owner, their provider, their protector, their governor, under all which characters they look unto him, and devote themselves to him, and expect everything from him.*I beg you, brethren, see whether it be thus with you: for, if you are Christians indeed, "you were as sheep going astray; but have now returned unto the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls."

***~~2. For the inflaming of your gratitude to the Lord Jesus Christ—~~***

If you have been brought home to the fold of Christ, need I ask, whence this change arose? You will know full well that it did not originate with you, nor was carried into effect by any power of your own. The silly sheep would as soon return by its own wisdom to the fold it has deserted, as you would accomplish such a change in yourselves. It was the Lord Jesus Christ who sought you out, and apprehended you, and brought you home on his shoulders rejoicing: and if he had not effected it all for you and in you, then you would have been roving from him to your last hour, and would have perished in your sins. Be thankful to him then: adore him for the grace that has so distinguished you. And, while you give him glory for having so made you to differ from others and from your former selves, let his mercy constrain you to surrender up yourselves to him wholly, and without reserve.

***~~3. To excite your compassion towards a perishing world—~~***

Were you to see a straying sheep beset with dogs who were tearing it to pieces, who among you would not compassionate its wretched condition? Yet is this but a very faint image of the world around you; and not of the heathen world only, but of professing Christians also. We see not indeed the fate prepared for them: we see not how they are already, as it were, in the jaws of the roaring lion, whose prey they will be to all eternity. But this is not the less true, because we do not see it. It is their real state; and soon shall we see it with our bodily eyes. Our blessed Lord, "when he saw the multitudes around him," (of persons *nominally*the Lord's people,) "he had compassion on them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd."

Do you then consider the deplorable condition of all around you, and use all possible means to bring them to the fold of Christ? Know for your comfort, that "he who shall convert a sinner from the error of his way, will save a soul from death, and hide a multitude of sins."

***~~#2400~~***

***~~GOD'S DISPOSITION TOWARDS THE RIGHTEOUS AND WICKED~~***

**[1 Peter 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.12)**

"For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

There is an error which reigns, to a considerable extent, among religious people, and which meets with too much encouragement also in the preaching of pious ministers; namely, an idea that to insist on moral duties is legal. Suppose a servant of Christ were to address his audience in the words of David, "Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies. Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it. The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry; the face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth, [Psalm 34:11-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.11-16)." I say, suppose a minister of the Gospel were to address his people thus, he would be thought by many to be bringing them back to the law, and to be instructing them in a way contrary to the whole tenor of the Gospel.

But this is a great mistake. Legality consists in *principle*only, and not in practice. If we teach men to do good works in order to obtain justification by them, that is legality; and that subverts the Gospel. But if, *while we make Christ the only foundation of a sinner's hope, we inculcate moral duties, we do nothing more than what Christian fidelity requires*, and nothing but what the Apostles themselves continually did. It is remarkable that Peter, addressing the whole Christian Church, cites the entire passage which I have read to you from the Psalm, and applies it precisely as David himself did, verse 10-12. In fact, we all need to be reminded, that "God will put a difference between those who serve him, and those who serve him not;" and that, while "his eyes are over the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers—his face is, and ever will be, against those who do evil."

In confirmation of this sentiment, I will show,

***~~I. God's tender regard for "the righteous"—~~***

***~~Here we must first state who "the righteous" are—~~***

We are not to understand this as relating to persons who are *perfectly*righteous, since there is no such a character to be found on earth. "There is not one that lives and sins not:" "in many things we all offend." *The term comprehends those who, in the prevailing habit and tenor of their lives, turn from iniquity to serve the living God*. He, therefore, who has fled to the Lord Jesus Christ for refuge, and, through the operation of the Spirit of God, is endeavoring to fulfill the will of God, may justly consider himself as answering to this character, notwithstanding many infirmities yet cleave unto him.

***~~Over all such persons the eyes of the Lord are fixed—~~***

God "beholds all, as well the evil as the good." But *on the righteous his eyes are fixed with peculiar delight*. He delights to look upon them: "His eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth," to show himself strong in their behalf; to protect them from every evil: and to supply them with every needful good.

***~~His ears, too, are open to their prayers—~~***

We all know with what a different feeling a parent beholds the children of strangers and his own. If his own child is in a situation of danger, his eye is upon it, to interpose in the time of need; and, if he were to hear its cry, all the tenderest feelings of his soul would be called forth, and all the efforts which he could make would be exerted for its relief. The inarticulate cry of an infant does not fall unheeded on a mother's ear.

Just so, God hears, not the prayer only, but the sighs and groans of his people; and will fulfill the unexpressed desires of their hearts: "Even before they cry, he will answer; and while they are yet speaking, he will hear!"

Such, however, are not his feelings towards all: for, in perfect contrast with this, is,

***~~II. His indignation against the wicked—~~***

"Those who do evil" must also be here defined—

We do not comprehend under this character those who have yet some remaining sins and infirmities; for this were to confound, in one indiscriminate mass, the righteous and the wicked: it is the *workers*of iniquity who are here spoken of; even those who, in the general tenor of their lives, are acting contrary to God's mind and will.

***~~Against these evil-doers, God sets his face—~~***

It is impossible but that he would view them with displeasure. He cannot forget what he has done for them, in sending his own Son to be the atoning sacrifice for their sins, and in striving with them by his Spirit to bring them to repentance: and when he sees how they requite these mercies, by holding fast their iniquities, by treading under foot his dear Son, and doing despite to his Spirit, he must of necessity be incensed against them.

Accordingly, we are told that "he is angry with them every day! [Psalm 7:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 7.11);" that "he sets his face upon them for evil, and not for good, [Amos 9:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 9.4);" and that he determines to execute upon them his wrathful indignation! [Deuteronomy 32:40-42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.40-42).

They, perhaps, are full of confidence in their own minds, and are saying, "I shall have peace, though I go on adding sin to sin!" But this only insures the evils which they will not deprecate: for God says, "The Lord will not spare that man; but the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against him; and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him; and the Lord shall blot out his name from under Heaven! [Deuteronomy 29:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 29.19-20)."

Instead of hearing his prayers, God further says concerning him, "I will deal in fury with him: my eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: though he cry in my ears with a loud voice—yet I will not hear him [Ezekiel 8:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 8.18)." Unhappy man! whoever you are, that live in willful sin! this is your lot; and this, if you die in sin, will be your portion to all eternity!

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

***~~1. Of how little signification are the opinions of men—~~***

If you are righteous, perhaps the world will condemn you as an wild enthusiast. But if you are countenancing them in their evil ways, they will perhaps applaud you as rational and wise. But to what purpose do men condemn, if God approves; or approve, if God condemns? If God's eye is upon us for good, we need not fear either men or devils: but if God sets his face against us, though the whole universe were confederate to protect us, they could afford no help: "Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished!"

***~~2. How desirable it is to obtain the approbation of our God—~~***

If there were no future world, the sense which the righteous have of God's favor would be an ample recompense for all their services. But we must take eternity into our account. We must follow the righteous and the wicked into the presence of their God. We must there see what his favor imports, and what his displeasure. *We must there behold the objects of his delight seated on thrones of glory; and the monuments of his indignation cast into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone! We must then contemplate their states as fixed to all eternity; so that, after millions of ages, the one will have no mitigation of his punishment, and the other no diminution of his bliss!*

Reflect on this, my brethren, and I shall not need to urge you to serve your God—your own feelings will urge you sufficiently: without any further loss of time, you will flee from the wrath to come, and, with all possible earnestness, lay hold on eternal life!

***~~#2401~~***

***~~THE PERSECUTED ENCOURAGED~~***

***~~[1 Peter 3:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.13-14)~~***

"Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. 'Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.' But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord."

Every kind of argument is urged in the Holy Scriptures to animate and encourage the followers of Christ. Sometimes the present benefit, arising from piety, is proposed as an inducement to walk in the paths of holiness: "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil," verses 10, 11." Sometimes a holy life and conduct is recommended by a consideration of the regard which God himself will pay to it, and the approbation of it which he will be sure to express: "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil, verse 12."

In my text, the approbation of men also is held forth, as in some respects a recompense to be hoped for: "Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?" But, aware that this argument would not always prove valid, the Apostle turns his address to a consolatory strain; and encourages the Lord's people with the thought, that if they would not meet with approbation from men, they might yet assure themselves of abundant support and comfort from their God.

Now, in these words, I wish you to notice:

***~~I. The point conceded—~~***

***~~Humanly speaking, it would seem impossible that any would "suffer for righteousness' sake"—~~***

If we are "followers of that which is good," and maintain a holy consistency in our conduct, we must, one would think, meet with universal approbation. For we give to no one any occasion for offense: and when we meet with unkindness from others, we render nothing but good in return for it. If perverse and prejudiced people will speak evil of us, "our good conduct will put them to silence" and "to shame, [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)."

Hence wives are encouraged to hope, that if, unfortunately, they are connected with unbelieving husbands, they may "by their good conduct win" those who would not be won by anything else, verse 1. At all events, after a season this may be expected, if not at first; since God has said, that "when a man's ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him, [Proverbs 16:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 16.7)." Hence the question in my text is reasonable, and, one would think, unanswerable.

***~~Experience, however, proves that sufferings for righteousness' sake cannot altogether be avoided—~~***

This is conceded in my text; and in other parts of this epistle is plainly intimated: "For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps, [1 Peter 2:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.19-21)."

Here it is intimated, not that we may suffer though we do well, and maintain a good conscience toward God—but *because*we do so: *our very piety may be the ground on which the sufferings are inflicted*. This shows that there is more connection between the different beatitudes in our Lord's Sermon on the Mount than we would be ready to imagine. Our Lord, after saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, and those who mourn, and the meek, and those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, and the merciful, and the pure, and the peace-makers," adds, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, [Matthew 5:3-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.3-11)."

But what connection can there be between persecution and the characters before portrayed? Can they be persecuted? Are there any people in the world so blind, yes, so abandoned, as to "revile them, and persecute them, and say all kinds of evil falsely against them," and that too "for Christ's sake," and because of his image that is thus enstamped upon them? Yes; *this piety is the very thing which will provoke the world's enmity, and call it forth in every act of hostility that can be conceived!*For thus has our Lord forewarned us: "If you were of the world, the world would love its own: but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you, [John 15:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.18-19)." David found it so in his day: "Those who repay my good with evil, slander me when I pursue what is good, [Psalm 38:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 38.20)." And we also shall find the same: for it is said, "All who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution, [2 Timothy 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.12)."

Indeed, *if our blessed Lord himself could not escape* *persecution, notwithstanding the inconceivable wisdom of his discourses, and the immaculate purity of his whole conduct*—then how shall we, who are so frail and fallible, hope to pass without much inveterate opposition? "If they called the master of the house Beelzebub, much more will they those of his household, [Matthew 10:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.25)." Hence we are told not to be surprised at persecution, when it comes: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you…. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as a busy-body in other men's matters: yet, if any man suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf, [1 Peter 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.12); [1 Peter 4:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.15-16)."

This point being conceded, let us proceed to consider,

***~~II. The consolation administered—~~***

Persecution for righteousness' sake is by no means so great an evil as people are apt to imagine.

***~~1. It is no proper ground for sorrow—~~***

Should anyone wish for a testimony from God, that he is in the right way, and that God is well-pleased with him? Behold, that is the very satisfaction which such evil treatment is intended to convey: "They will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name, [Luke 21:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 21.12)." But it is, in fact, a participation of Christ's sufferings, and a source of great glory to God. And is that a ground of sorrow? No, but rather of exalted joy; as the Apostle tells us: "Rejoice, inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that when his glory shall be revealed, you may be glad also with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, happy are you; for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part, he is evil spoken of; but on your part, he is glorified, [1 Peter 4:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.13-14)."

In truth, it is a signal *honor*conferred upon us: and, instead of repining at it, we ought to "rejoice that we are counted worthy" to sustain it! [Acts 5:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.41). But to speak of it thus, is, in reality, to come very far short of the statement which would be given: for, if the truth be spoken, it is a most invaluable gift: "Unto you it is given, in the behalf of Christ, not only to *believe*on him, but also to *suffer*for his sake, [Philippians 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.29)." Yes, it is conferred as God's choicest gift, in answer to the prayers of his only dear Son. In bestowing upon us pardon, and peace, and holiness, and glory—God gives to us. But when we are permitted to suffer for righteousness' sake—we give to God: we give our reputation, our property, our body, our life, to be disposed of according to his will, and for the glory of his name. And surely this is an honor in which we ought to rejoice with most sincere and exalted joy, [Matthew 5:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.12).

***~~2. It is no just occasion for fear—~~***

I will grant that there is a confederacy of the whole world against us: (that is the case supposed by the prophet, whose words are cited in my text, [Isaiah 8:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.12-13).) What can they do? They cannot touch so much as a hair of our head, without the special permission of our God! [Matthew 10:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.29-30). Nor can they do any one thing which God shall not overrule for our eternal good! [Romans 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.28).

Hear the representation which holy David gives us of this matter: "The wicked plots against the just, and gnashes upon him with his teeth. The Lord shall laugh at him! [Psalm 37:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 37.12-13)." And if the Lord "laughs," shall we cry? God designs both to prepare us for glory, and to increase to us the measure of our happiness to all eternity: and for these ends *he permits ungodly men to put us into a furnace, that lie may "purify us from our dross;" and he makes "our light and momentary affliction to work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory!*2 Corinthians 4:17."

Now, who that knew the designs of Heaven in relation to us, would dread the process by which such ends were to be accomplished? God has said, that "the wrath of man shall praise him; and the remainder of it he will restrain." As one, who, in a flood that threatens to destroy his mill, lets upon it so much water only as shall accomplish his own purposes, and turns off the remainder by another sluice; so will God effect his gracious purposes for his people's good, by the very efforts which their enemies are making for their destruction. Knowing this, therefore, we would "not be afraid of their terror, nor be troubled" at any confederacies they may make against us.

***~~3. A due regard to God is an ample security to all his people—~~***

To "sanctify the Lord God in our hearts" is to conceive of him as an all-wise Governor, that orders everything in Heaven and earth; and as an all-sufficient Protector, who is "a wall of fire round about" his people, not only to protect them, but to devour their assailants, [Zechariah 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 2.5); and, lastly, as an all-gracious Rewarder, who, "if we *suffer*with him, will cause us also to *reign*with him, that we may be glorified together, [2 Timothy 2:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.11-12). [Romans 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.17)." In this view of him, our duty is precisely what Peter tells us: "Let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator, [1 Peter 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.19)."

*We have only to realize in our hearts the agency, the power, the love, the faithfulness, of the omnipresent God—and we shall be as composed in the conflict, and as confident of the victory, as if we were already in Heaven!*If God has said, "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, [Isaiah 41:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.10);" it is not merely our privilege, but our duty, to reply with David, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom then shall I be afraid, [Psalm 27:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 27.1)."

***~~Improvement—~~***

***~~1. Let us be thankful for the peace we presently enjoy—~~***

There have been seasons in the Church when persecution has raged with great fury, and almost driven Christianity from the face of the earth. That it is not so now, is not owing to men's love of religion; but to the protection afforded by human laws, and to the *prevalence of an idea that toleration in religion is essential to civil liberty*. It is however a great mercy to us to live in these days: and I call upon you to improve the opportunities afforded you. You can assemble together, none making you afraid—you can consecrate yourselves to the Lord, without any apprehension of being dragged for it to prison or to death.

You must not however imagine, that "the offense of the cross has ceased," or that you will not in your domestic and social circles have anything to suffer. You may still have to make considerable sacrifices—your parents may still act an unkind and oppressive part towards you; and your friends may treat you with such contempt as is not easy to be borne.

But, if you are not "called to resist unto blood," you have reason to be thankful: and, in this season of comparative peace, you must prepare to maintain, when called to it, a vigorous and active warfare. The *roaring lion*is as vigilant as ever to destroy; and you also must be vigilant, if you would defeat his efforts, [1 Peter 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.8).

***~~2. Let us, when persecution shall arise—act worthy of our high and holy calling—~~***

The command of our blessed Lord is, that we would be ready to lay down our lives for his sake. And he has plainly told us, that "he who will save his life, shall lose it; and he alone who will lose his life for his sake, shall save it unto life eternal, [Luke 17:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 17.33)." On no other terms can we be acknowledged as his disciples. Nor would we wish for any other terms than these. We would be ready to "rejoice in tribulation, [Romans 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.3);" and to "glory in the cross, [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.14)." for our Lord's sake. Yes, we would even "take pleasure in infirmities and distresses for his sake," in order that he may be glorified in us, and that "his strength may be perfected in our weakness, [2 Corinthians 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.10)." To all of you then I say: Prepare to approve yourselves "good soldiers of Jesus Christ." Whoever you are, you are to "fight the good fight of faith, [1 Timothy 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.12)," and to stem the torrent against all the enemies of your salvation: and to you God says, as he did to the Prophet Ezekiel, "Behold, I have made your face strong against their faces, and your forehead strong against their foreheads; as an adamant, harder than flint, have I made your forehead: fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house, [Ezekiel 3:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 3.8-9)." "Be faithful unto death, and then will God give unto you the crown of life! [Revelation 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.10)."

***~~#2402~~***

***~~THE CHRISTIAN READY TO GIVE AN ACCOUNT OF HIS HOPE~~***

**[1 Peter 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.15)**

"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."

*The Christian's life must of necessity appear strange to those who know not the principles by which he is actuated.*They see a friend or relative pause amidst the crowd of his associates, and retrace, in opposition to them, all the steps he has trodden throughout his whole life. Perhaps he was highly respected; and he now subjects himself to ridicule and contempt, from those who once held him in estimation. Perhaps he had fair prospects of advancement in the world, which now, by what are called his fanatical and over-righteous proceedings, he abandons. *He once seemed happy in the enjoyment of all that the world could give him; and now he is turning his back upon it all*, and following after phantoms of his own imagination.

What can all this mean?

Whence does it proceed?

Is it the effect of a disturbed imagination?

Is it from a desire after notoriety and distinction?

Or is it the fruit of deliberate hypocrisy?

What has he seen, what has he found—that can account for such a change in his conduct?

Such questions will arise in the minds of many. Many indeed will not trouble themselves with making such inquiries. A shorter method with them is to revile and persecute, if by any means they may deter this *supposed enthusiast*from persisting in his folly: but others, who are more candid, will be glad of information, in order that they may be able to form some judgment about the proceedings which appear at first sight so unaccountable.

Now with respect to the former of these, the open persecutors, the Christian has nothing to do, but to commit his cause to God, and to go forward in humble dependence upon him. But with respect to the latter, he would gladly rise to the occasion, and "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."

You will perceive that the principle by which the Christian is carried forward, is hope—"the hope that is within him."

What the Christian's hope is, will form the first point for our inquiry.

His duty in relation to it shall then, in the next place, be set before you.

***~~I. What is the HOPE by which the Christian is carried forward?~~***

Whatever may be thought of it,

***~~It is a glorious hope—~~***

*It has respect to all that the soul of man can need, and to all that God himself can bestow.* Contemplate man as a sinner, redeemed from sin and death through the blood of God's only dear Son, who at the same time has purchased for him all the glory and felicity of Heaven: hope fixes upon all these things as promised to the penitent and believing soul:

Pardon and acceptance with a reconciled God;

fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ, and a constant communication of grace and peace out of his fullness;

the preserving and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit;

victory over death and Hell;

and an everlasting possession of Heaven as a rightful inheritance!

All of this is apprehended by the believing Christian as his true and proper portion!*By hope, he surveys it all, anticipates it all, enjoys it all.*How wonderful! how surpassing all conception! Yet "every child of God is begotten to a living hope of all these things, 1 Peter 1:3."

***~~It is a well-founded hope—~~***

It may well be asked, What warrant has the Christian to indulge such a hope as this? Is it a mere conceit of his own, an expectation unauthorized and presumptuous? No! it is a hope founded upon the promise and oath of the immutable Jehovah. God has revealed a way of salvation, through the blood and righteousness of his only-begotten Son; and has promised to accept to mercy all who shall come to him in the name of Christ. To all such, without exception, he has engaged to give all the blessings both of grace and glory. And in resting on his engagements, the believer cannot be deceived: for "God cannot lie." "He cannot deny himself."

The Christian has a further ground of hope, in his own actual experience of these things. For in coming to God through Christ, he has found peace to his soul: he has received grace, whereby he is enabled to serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear, and "through the hope that is in him he does actually purify himself, even as Christ is pure! 1 [John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.3)."

Here then he stands as upon a rock that defies the assaults whether of men or devils.

***~~It is a hope that raises him up above all the things of time and sense—~~***

*In the prospect of all the blessings that are promised to him, how empty and insignificant do all earthly things appear! They are regarded by him as the dust upon the balance; yes, as lighter than vanity itself.* However important the concerns of this world may seem, they are but for a moment; whereas the objects of the Christian's hope are everlasting. Nor are the sufferings of this present world, however formidable in themselves, regarded by him as worthy of any consideration, in comparison with the glory which he sees revealed before his eyes, and which he expects shortly to inherit! [Romans 8:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.18).

Here is the great secret of all his actings. Even in this life a man will endure much labor and self-denial, in order to obtain some great advantage: what then will not a man both do and suffer, who has all the glory of Heaven in view, and an assured prospect of attaining it, if only he "holds on his way," and "be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel?"

Such being the Christian's hope, let us inquire,

***~~II. What is his duty in relation to it?~~***

The principle which operates so forcibly on the Christian's mind cannot be fully appreciated by one who is a stranger to it in his own soul: yet may it, by a judicious statement, be brought so far within the view of an unenlightened mind, as to carry conviction with it to the heart and conscience: and every one who professes it would be ready to afford to an inquirer all possible satisfaction respecting it: he would "be ready to give to every one a reason of the hope that is in him:"

***~~1. With frankness and fidelity—~~***

It is here supposed that an *inquiry*is made respecting our hope: for otherwise it is by no means expedient that a Christian is ever bringing forward his own personal experience, and making that the subject of conversation. To do this is detestable. Paul, when forced by the accusations of his enemies to vindicate himself, and to declare the experience of his soul, again and again, with indignation, as it were, against himself, says, "I speak as a fool." And, where it is done without necessity, it is as strong a proof of a vain and weak mind as can well be conceived.

But where a man asks us a reason of the hope that is in us, we would readily and cheerfully give him an answer. We would not be ashamed of our principles. We would never doubt whether they will bear us out, provided they be clearly and justly stated. We would candidly state: That we are sinners, deserving of God's wrath and indignation: that God has sent his only-begotten Son to die for us: that through his precious blood we believe that we have obtained the forgiveness of all our sins.

We would then state our conviction, that sinners redeemed with so inestimable a price are bound to consecrate themselves to him, and, above all things, to seek the glory of his great name.

We would further avow our full persuasion, that in the day of judgment we shall all be dealt with according to our works; that those who have allowed anything to stand in competition with their duty to Christ, will assuredly be cast out as wicked and unprofitable servants; but that those who have loved, and served, and honored him with their whole hearts, shall be applauded by him as good and faithful servants, and enter forever into the joy of their Lord. We may then appeal to the most prejudiced mind, and ask: Whether, with such views and principles, it be not our bounden duty to act as we do?

This kind of statement would be made readily, to all without exception who desire to hear it, and are ready to attend to it. Whether they be more or less candid in their inquiries, we should account it a valuable opportunity to set before them the leading truths of Christianity; and we should avail ourselves of it, with a view at least to silence their objections, and, if it may please God, to convert and save their souls.

***~~2. With gentleness and respect—~~***

There is, not infrequently, found among the professors of religion a very *unhallowed boldness and forwardness in declaring their opinions*. This is extremely indecorous, and odious in the eyes both of God and man. Though, as far as respects the truth itself, we should have no hesitation in declaring it—yet we should be much on our guard against anything harsh or acrimonious in our manner of declaring it. *Suavity and kindness befit us on all occasions, and especially when speaking on the things of God*. We must speak the truth indeed, whether it is palatable or not: but we must "speak the truth in love," and "Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will! [2 Timothy 2:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.25-26)."

A Christian on such occasions must bear in mind how much the honor of God is involved in his conduct; and how much, humanly speaking, the salvation of others may depend on him. By an indiscreet mode of vindicating the truth, he may shut the ears, and harden the hearts of many; and so embitter their minds, as to make them determined haters and despisers of vital godliness. But by a meek, modest, affectionate, and prudent statement, he may remove their prejudices, and lead them to a candid examination of their own state before God.

Hence then he would speak with fear, even as the Apostle Paul himself did at Corinth, where, as he himself tells us, "he was among them in weakness and fear and much trembling, [1 Corinthians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.3)." By thus combining meekness with fidelity, and fear with zeal, he may hope that he shall be the means of silencing opposers, and of winning many who would never have attended to the written or preached word, [1 Peter 3:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.1-2).

***~~I would yet further enforce the exhortation in our text, with such advice as naturally arises out of it—~~***

Let it be the daily labor of your lives to be such as our text requires:

***~~1. Be well-informed Christians—~~***

You ought to be able to "give to every inquirer a reason of the hope that is in you." It is a disgrace to a Christian not to possess such a measure of divine knowledge, as shall qualify him for this. It is not necessary that every Christian should be a disputant, and be able to enter into theological controversies: but every Christian man should be able to answer this question: "Why are you a Christian?" Alas! the generality of Christians, so called, can assign no better reason for being Christians, than a Turk can for being a Mohammedan. But to all such I must say, You have yet to learn what a scriptural hope is; and have only "the hope of a hypocrite, which will be swept away like a spider's web!" I beseech you all then to study the Scriptures with all diligence; and to pray unto God, that you may by them be made wise unto everlasting salvation.

***~~2. Be steadfast Christians—~~***

You must expect that your faith and patience will be tried: but you must not give way to fear, or be diverted from your duty by any consideration whatever. *There should be in you such a hope, as, like an anchor of the soul, shall keep you steadfast amidst all the storms and tempests with which you may be assailed!*[Hebrews 6:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.19). *By means of this divine principle of hope, you should be realizing all the glories of the eternal world; in the view of which, all earthly glories will sink into insignificance, and all earthly trials appear "light and momentary!* [2 Corinthians 4:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.17-18)." Survey then the inheritance to which you are begotten: take Pisgah views of the promised land: and then you shall be enabled to say respecting everything that may occur, "None of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I may but finish my course with joy."

***~~3. Be humble Christians—~~***

*Humility is the root and summit of Christian maturity.*If men see you offended and irritated by the unkind usage which you experience, they will say, "Wherein are their *principles*superior to ours; or their *conduct*better than ours? They pretend to possess a hope that lifts up their souls in an extraordinary degree—but wherein does it show itself? What do they do more than others?

It is a common thing for persons professing godliness to feel towards their revilers and persecutors the very same contempt and hatred which their persecutors manifest towards them. But this is a proof, that, whatever they may profess of love to Christ, they have never attained "the mind that was in Christ." If you would be Christians indeed, you must resemble Him "who was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and was mute before his persecutors, even as a sheep before its shearers is silent," and who in the very agonies of crucifixion prayed for his murderers. So must you "show all meekness towards all men," and be more fearful of dishonoring God, or of casting a stumbling-block before your enemies, by anything hasty or ill-advised, than of suffering all that the most bitter persecutors can inflict upon you. Thus "letting patience have its perfect work, you will be perfect and entire, lacking nothing! [James 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.4)."

***~~#2403~~***

***~~THE NATURE AND ENDS OF CHRIST'S DEATH~~***

***~~[1 Peter 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.18)~~***

"Christ also has once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God."

"Sufferings, of whatever kind, are not in themselves joyous, but grievous:" nevertheless they may on some occasions become a source of joy and triumph. If, for instance, they are inflicted for righteousness' sake, and we have the testimony of our conscience that we suffer for well-doing, we may then sincerely rejoice in them, as on other accounts, so especially because they render us conformable to our Lord and Savior.

This thought was suggested by Peter as a rich source of consolation to the persecuted Christians of his day: nor can we have any stronger incentive to patience and diligence in every part of our duty, than the consideration of what Christ has done and suffered for our sake.

The words before us lead us to contemplate:

***~~I. The nature of Christ's sufferings—~~***

We speak not of their quality, as physical or spiritual, but of their nature as described in the text. They were,

***~~1. Christ's sufferings were PENAL—~~***

Some affirm that the sufferings of Christ were only to confirm his doctrine, and to set an example for us: but these ends might have been equally answered by the sufferings of his Apostles If there was nothing penal in our Lord's sufferings, his example was not near so bright as that of many of his disciples; since he neither met his sufferings with so much fortitude, nor endured them with such triumphant exultation, as many of his followers have since done. But if they were the penalty due to sin, his apparent inferiority is fully accounted for. *His sufferings were the punishment of sin—and the wrath of God due to sin was the bitterest ingredient in them*. We had merited the curse and condemnation of the law: and he, to deliver us from it, "became a curse for us, [Galatians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.10); [Galatians 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.13)." "He suffered for sins;" and though his punishment was not precisely the same either in quality or duration, as ours would have been—yet*it was equivalent to our demerit, and satisfactory to the justice of an offended God.*

***~~2. Christ's sufferings were VICARIOUS—~~***

It was not for any sin of his own that Jesus was cut off, [Daniel 9:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 9.26); he was "a Lamb without spot or blemish, [1 Peter 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.19)," as even his enemies, after the strictest scrutiny, were forced to confess, [John 18:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 18.38); [John 19:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 19.6). He died, "the just *for*the unjust, and in the *place*of the unjust—this imports substitution. The iniquities of his people were laid upon him, [Isaiah 53:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.6); he was wounded *for*our transgressions, and bruised *for*our iniquities, and the chastisement he endured was to effect our peace, [Isaiah 53:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.4). He, who was innocent, became a sin-offering for us, that we, who are guilty, might be made righteous in him, [2 Corinthians 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.21).

***~~3. Christ's sufferings were PROPITIATORY—~~***

The death of Christ, like all the sacrifices under the Jewish law, was an atonement for sin. It is continually compared with the Jewish sacrifices in this view in the book of Hebrews. We are not saying that that the Father hated us, and needed to have his wrath appeased by the interposition of his Son (for the very gift of Christ was the fruit of the Father's love, [John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.16).); but we say, in concurrence with all the inspired writers, that *when it was necessary for the honor of the Divine government that sin would be punished, either in the offender himself or in his surety, Christ became our surety, and by his own death made a true and proper atonement for our sins, and thus effected our reconciliation with God*, [Ephesians 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.2) and [1 John 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.2). On any other supposition than this, the whole Mosaic ritual was absurd, and the writings of the New Testament are altogether calculated to deceive us.

From considering the nature of our Lord's sufferings, let us proceed to notice,

***~~II. The end of Christ's sufferings—~~***

His one great design was to bring us to God:

***~~1. To a state of acceptance with him—~~***

We were "enemies to God in our minds by wicked works;" nor could we by any means reconcile ourselves to God.

We could never reconcile ourselves to God by our obedience, because the law required perfect obedience: which, having once transgressed the law, we could never afterwards pay

We could never reconcile ourselves to God by our suffering, because the penalty denounced against sin was eternal.

But, when it was impossible for us to restore ourselves to God's favor, we were reconciled to him by Christ's obedience unto death, [Colossians 1:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.21-22). [Romans 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.10); and to effect this reconciliation was the very end for which he laid down his life, [Ephesians 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.16).

***~~2. To the enjoyment of his presence in this present world—~~***

The holy of holies was inaccessible to all except the high-priest; nor could even he enter into it except on the great day of annual expiation, [Hebrews 9:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.7-8). But at the very instant of our Lord's death, while the Jews were worshiping in the temple, the veil was rent in twain from the top to the bottom, and the most holy place was opened to the view of all, [Matthew 27:50-51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.50-51). This was intended to declare, that from henceforth all might have the freest and most intimate access to God, [Ephesians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.13); [Ephesians 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.18). All are now made priests unto God, [Revelation 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.6); and, in this new and living way, may come to his mercy-seat to behold his glory, and to enjoy his love, [Hebrews 10:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.19-22); [Hebrews 12:18-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.18-24).

***~~3. To the possession of his glory in the world to come—~~***

It was not only to save us from condemnation, but to exalt us to everlasting happiness, that Jesus died! The salvation which he procured for us, is a "salvation with eternal glory, [2 Timothy 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.10)." The robes in which the celestial spirits are arrayed, were washed in his blood, [Revelation 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 7.14); and all the ransomed hosts unite in ascribing to him the felicity they enjoy, [Revelation 5:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.9-10); [Revelation 5:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.12). Nothing short of this could answer the purposes of his love, [John 17:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.24); and the accomplishment of this was the ultimate end of all he suffered, [Hebrews 2:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.9-10).

***~~Before we conclude this subject, let us contemplate—~~***

***~~1. How great is the love of Christ to our fallen race!~~***

Who would do anything like this for a fellow-creature? [Romans 5:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.7-8). Neither Moses, [Exodus 32:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 32.32); nor Paul, [Romans 9:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.3). thought of anything like this. See the Discourse on [Romans 9:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.1-5).

***~~2. How cheerfully should we endure sufferings for his sake.~~***

Compare, verse 14 with the text, and [Hebrews 13:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.12-13) and [Acts 5:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.41).

**3. How inexcusable will they be who continue still at a distance from God.** [John 15:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.22) and [Hebrews 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.3).

***~~#2404~~***

***~~NOAH'S ARK, A TYPE OF CHRIST~~***

***~~[1 Peter 3:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.20-21)~~***

" . . . in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also--not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God."

God has marked the necessity of holiness no less by the dispensations of his providence than by the declarations of his grace. His destroying of the whole world for their iniquity, evinced as strongly as anything could, that sin would never go unpunished, and that the righteous alone would be saved. In this view Peter introduces the mention of that well-attested fact, and declares, that the salvation experienced by Noah in the ark, was typical of that which we experience by Christ, and into which we are brought by our baptism. The text is by no means free from difficulties: to render it as intelligible as we can, we shall consider,

***~~I. The typical salvation here referred to—~~***

***~~God had determined to overwhelm the world with a deluge—~~***

Though there had been so few generations upon earth, that Noah's own father (Lamech) had been contemporary with Adam for sixty years, and lived until within five years of the flood, so that Noah, and the people of that generation, had, for no less than six hundred years together, received instruction only at second hand from Adam himself—yet had "all flesh corrupted their way," insomuch that "God regretted that he had made man," and resolved to destroy him from off the face of the earth.

***~~But for the preservation of the righteous, he instructed Noah to make an ark—~~***

This vessel was not constructed according to man's device, but by the special direction of God himself. To the eyes of man it doubtless seemed an absurd attempt: but "the foolishness of God is wiser than man;" and the outcome justified the hopes and expectations of Noah.

***~~In the mean time he called the people to repentance by the ministry of Noah—~~***

God exercised forbearance towards them one hundred and twenty years. But they "received his grace in vain." And the means used for their salvation only ripened them for destruction.

***~~When the appointed time was come, he ordered Noah and his family to go into the ark—~~***

The signs of the flood did not yet appear; but these favorites of Heaven were to condemn the world, not in word only, but in deed. By manifesting their faith, their fear, and their obedience, they were practically to condemn the world's unbelief, security, and disobedience, [Hebrews 11:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.7). And, upon their entrance into the ark, "God shut them in" with his own hand, that the door might be secure against the violence of the wind and waves.

***~~Then the waters that destroyed all the world besides, bore up them in perfect safety—~~***

Every other refuge now proved vain. The unbelievers found to their cost the truth of God's threatenings. Their numbers did not screen them from his judgments. Nor was the fewness of the elect any bar to their acceptance and salvation. They rose, while all others sank in the mighty waters. Nor, if any cleaved to the ark, did that avail them. The very builders of the ark perished. They, and they only, who were in the ark, were made the monuments of God's saving mercy!

This history being altogether typical, we shall consider,

***~~II. The correspondent salvation which we enjoy—~~***

Baptism is spoken of in the text as the antitype, of which Noah's flood was the type. But we apprehend the Apostle's meaning to be, that *Noah's salvation in the ark was typical of our salvation under the Christian dispensation*. This subject will be best understood, not by drawing the parallel between the flood and baptism, or between the ark and Christ, but by exhibiting the fact of our salvation as corresponding with that of Noah.

***~~God has determined to punish the world with an everlasting destruction—~~***

His word bears frequent and most undeniable testimony to this solemn truth, [Matthew 24:37-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.37-39). [2 Peter 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.5); [2 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.9). [Psalm 11:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 11.6); [Psalm 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 9.17).

***~~But he has prepared a Savior for those who repent and turn unto him—~~***

*Human wisdom never could have devised a way of saving sinners consistently with the honor of God's perfections.* But God has sent and qualified his only-begotten Son, that, through him, all who believe might be justified from all things. And though salvation through the death of Christ is "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness," yet to those who are called to partake of it, it has invariably proved the power of God and the wisdom of God! [1 Corinthians 1:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.23-24).

***~~Ever since the method of salvation has been announced to the world, God has been inviting sinners to embrace it—~~***

The first plank of this ark was laid, if we may so speak, when God promised to Adam a "Seed, who would bruise the serpent's head." From that day, it has been erecting visibly in the world, in order that, while men were warned of their danger, they might see their remedy: and now, for nearly six thousand years, has God exercised forbearance towards an impenitent and unbelieving world.

***~~By "baptism" we embark, as it were, on board this divinely-constructed vessel—~~***

[Editor's note: We find some of Simeon's Anglican theology expressed in this section to be unbiblical.]

When we are baptized into the Christian faith, we profess our persuasion that "there is salvation in no other," and our desire "to be found in him," not having our own righteousness, but that which is from God by faith in him, [Acts 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.12). [Philippians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.9). Thus we come to be in him, as a branch in the vine, as a man-slayer in a city of refuge, as Noah in the ark. Not that this benefit is annexed to the mere outward form of baptism, but to that baptism which is accompanied with "the answer of a good conscience towards God."

***~~Being then in Christ, we are saved "by his resurrection, verse 21."—~~***

It would seem, that Noah's enclosure in the ark for so long a period was a kind of sepulture; and his elevation on the waters, until he afterwards came forth from the ark, was a kind of resurrection, when he took possession of a new world. Thus, according to Paul, "we are buried with Christ by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life: for if we have been planted in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection, [Romans 6:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.4-5)." This appears to be intended by Peter in the text, and to be, on the whole, the most natural, as well as most beautiful, construction of it. As Noah entered into the ark, and was saved by its elevation above the water-floods, so we, by baptism, enter into Christ, and are, by his resurrection, saved from sin and Satan, death and Hell. Yes, like Noah too, we are brought safely to the possession of a new and heavenly world!

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How deeply should we reverence the ordinances of God!~~***

What is said of baptism is true, in a measure, of every other ordinance: yet how shamefully is both that, and every other ordinance, profaned among us! Let us remember, that all the institutions of God are intended to help forward our salvation: but, if trifled with, they will fearfully aggravate our condemnation.

***~~2. How careful should we be to obtain "the answer of a good conscience!"~~***

In the Apostles' days, as well as in ours, those who applied for baptism, were interrogated with respect to their faith and practice; nor could the mere ablution of the body profit them, if they had not a correspondent purity of soul.

Thus it is with us: we shall in vain receive the rite of baptism, or partake of the Lord's supper—if we cannot declare, as in the presence of God, that it is our desire and endeavor to be holy as God is holy.

***~~Let us then not lay an undue stress upon outward observances of any kind; but rather seek a conformity to the Divine image; for it will surely be found true at the last, that "the pure in heart shall see God," but that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord."~~***

***~~#2405~~***

***~~A WORLDLY LIFE TO BE RELINQUISHED~~***

***~~[1 Peter 4:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.2-3)~~***

"As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do--living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry."

*The end of all God's dispensations towards his people is to promote their advancement in righteousness and true holiness.* The Lord Jesus Christ himself "was made perfect through sufferings;" and the afflictions which his people suffer, from whatever quarter they arise, are intended "for their profit, to make them partakers of God's holiness." The Lord's people are "ordained to suffer," in conformity to their Divine Master: and their great concern should be, not so much to get rid of their trials, as to make a due improvement of them, by "ceasing from sin," and living more entirely to God, and for God.

To this purpose the Apostle speaks in the, verses before my text; and then adds, that the time past might well suffice to have lived after the manner of the pagan world, whose ways it became them henceforth determinately to renounce,

From the words before us I shall take occasion to show:

***~~I. In what respects professing Christians have lived like the pagans—~~***

The unconverted man, whether Jew or Gentile, is cast into the same mold, and, in the main, walks in the same paths. The nominal Christian also has the same views, the same desires, the same pursuits. In some external matters he may differ from the heathen: but in the most essential parts of his conduct he accords with them. He resembles them,

***~~1. In an utter disregard of God—~~***

The heathen, of course, cannot regard God, because they know him not, nor are at all acquainted with his will. The nominal Christian has in some little degree the knowledge of his will; but he regards it no more than if he were utterly unacquainted with it. "He professes to know God; but in works he denies him."

On this subject let me appeal to yourselves. It is, I confess, a heavy charge, to say that you have hitherto "lived like pagans." But I would put it to your own consciences, and ask: What regard have you shown for God's authority? and, What desire have you manifested to obtain his favor? You have had in your very hands the means of knowing his will—you profess to believe that the Scriptures have been given to you by God, on purpose to instruct you in the knowledge of him.

Have you been thankful for this revelation of his will?

Have you studied it with care, for the express purpose of learning how you might please and serve him acceptably?

Have you turned away from everything which his word forbids?

Have you followed after everything which his word enjoins?

Have you embraced the whole of it as an infallible record, believing all that it reveals, and expecting with hope and fear the accomplishment of all his promises and all his threats?

Have you, in short, "trembled at his word," as it befits you to do?

Have you humbled yourselves before him for all your past transgressions?

Have you fled for refuge to the hope set before you?

Have you washed your souls daily in the blood of the Lamb, even in that fountain which was opened for sin and for impurity?

Have you cried mightily to God for the gift of his Holy Spirit to sanctify you, and to transform you into the Divine image?

Have you surrendered up your souls to God as living sacrifices, and accounted an entire dedication of yourselves to him your reasonable service?

If you have not done this, wherein have you differed from the heathen; except indeed, that you have sinned against greater light and knowledge than they, and therefore involved yourselves in deeper guilt and heavier condemnation!

***~~2. In a determined prosecution of your own evil desires—~~***

The character given of the Gentiles is, that "they lived to the lusts of men, and not to the will of God, verse 2."

And what have you done?

By what standard have you regulated your conduct?

Whose will have you consulted?

***~~A decent heathen regulates himself according to the standard which the society in which he lives has established. Whatever they approve, he follows: and whatever would degrade him in their estimation, he avoids.~~***

And has it not been thus with you also? In whatever line of life you move, have you not conformed to the habits of your associates, accounting everything innocent which they deemed innocent; and were satisfied with yourselves, if you only satisfied them? Among the particular habits of the Gentiles, the Apostle enumerates, "living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry," and do not these characterize the professing Christian world also? If we are free from open idolatry, we are guilty of it in our hearts as much as the heathen themselves: for while some "make a God of their appetite," and others are addicted to "covetousness, which is idolatry," we all, in one way or other, "love and serve the creature more than the Creator, who is over all, blessed forever." As to all the other evils, it will be well if we have not been guilty even in the outward act: for "living in debauchery, lust, and drunkenness" are not such uncommon evils among us; but, granting that we have been free as it respects the act, have we abhorred the very thought of such evils, as we ought? Have we not, on the contrary, found pleasure in "revelings and banquetings," and "such like," without ever thinking that "those who do such things cannot inherit the kingdom of God!" Compare the words following the text with [Galatians 5:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.19-21).

Is it not a notorious fact, that this season of the year, which ought to be in a more especial manner consecrated to holy duties, is devoted to "reveling and banqueting;" precisely as if the Lord Jesus Christ had come unto the world, not to deliver us from sin, but to give us a licence to sin! It would be well if those who speak of a *merry Christmas*, would inquire what is meant by "revelings, and such like."

But, whether we have indulged in these things or not, still the same charge must be reiterated against us; namely, that we have lived to ourselves, and not to God; and *have made our own inclinations the rule of our conduct, instead of adhering to his commands*. This is "the course of this world;" this is the line of conduct which characterizes without exception, "the children of disobedience," and the vassals of the wicked one, [Ephesians 2:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.2-3).

Say now, brethren, whether you have not "lived like pagans;" or, in other words, whether you have not lived like "atheists" and heathen, [Ephesians 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.12)?

Let me then proceed to show you:

***~~II. That the time past may well suffice for such a course as that—~~***

Let me put it to yourselves:

***~~1. What benefit have you derived from this wicked course hitherto?~~***

Have you found that the gratifications you have enjoyed have afforded you any solid satisfaction? You "have sown vanity; and what but vanity has been your recompense? [Job 15:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 15.31)" Paul puts the question to us, "What fruit had you then in those things whereof you are now ashamed, [Romans 6:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.21)." Has not the creature proved, what God forewarned you it would prove, "a broken cistern, that could hold no water?"

You have come, I will suppose, to a season of great trouble, or perhaps of sickness and approaching dissolution.

Now what consolation have you from all that ever you enjoyed?

Can the remembrance of it comfort you?

Can it assuage your pains, or administer support under them?

Can it pacify a guilty conscience, or take away the sting of death?

Can it gild your last scenes, and brighten your prospects in the eternal world?

Alas! alas! have you not "spent your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which satisfies not! [Isaiah 55:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.2)."

I will even suppose that you have possessed all that Solomon himself possessed, and reveled like him in every species of indulgence: what do you now find it all to be, but "vanity and vexation of spirit!" Is it not "high time, then, that you awake" from your delusions! [Romans 13:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 13.11). After having so long "fed upon ashes, and been turned aside by a deceived heart," is it not high time that you at last see that "you have had nothing but a lie in your right hand! [Isaiah 44:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 44.20)."

***~~2. What benefit do you expect to derive your wicked course hereafter?~~***

If you follow your sinful course ever so long, do you expect that it will be productive of any more happiness than it has already been? Will the creature change? or the condition of man change? Or will God so change the whole course of nature, that you shall find in earthly things what is to be found in him alone?

But, if such changes are not to be expected, then what will be the outcome of such a course at the tribunal of your God? Had you been pagans, it might be expected, if I may so speak, that you had lived like pagans; or at all events, you would then "be judged by such a law as you yourselves had lived under, [Romans 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.14)."

But you were professing Christians; and had the law of God in your hands; yes, and the Gospel of Christ too: and therefore you shall be judged by the law, and by the Gospel, which you have so neglected and despised.

I would that professing Christians would place themselves as at the bar of judgment; and bethink themselves, what will be their view of their present courses then? Will a life of carnal ease and indulgence, together with a neglect of God and of our eternal interests, be found so trivial then? To have *professed ourselves Christians, and have lived like pagans*, will this appear so light a matter, as it is judged now to be? No truly: things will then be seen in their true colors; and the care of the soul will then appear to be, what it really is, "the one thing needful."

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

If now you are not convinced that the time past is sufficient for such a course, I beg permission to ask: what time you will think sufficient? I presume you will not say, that the whole life is to be spent in such a way. I conceive that no one is so blind, but that he will acknowledge that God ought to be served at some time or other; and that, at some time or other, the concerns of the soul ought to occupy the mind.

Even those who die by the hands of the public executioner confess, that some preparation is desirable for them, before they enter into the presence of their God. What time then will you agree to be sufficient to work the will of the Gentiles; and when will you account it reasonable to begin to fulfill the will of God? Will you say, twenty years hence; or, forty years hence? Such a period as that may surely be acknowledged latitude enough, even for the youngest among us.

But, if you will go to those who have served the world and their own lusts for twenty or forty years, you will not find them at all more ready to turn to God, than they were the first moment that they entered on their course of wickedness. On the contrary, *the longer they have lived in sin, the more rooted are their lusts, and the more inveterate their habits!*Their consciences, too, are the more seared and hardened; and the more averse are they to be instructed in the way of righteousness.

Besides, are we sure that so many years shall be added to our lives; or that, if they are, we shall be at all more disposed to serve God then, than we are at present? Are we sure that the Spirit of God, to whom we have continually rejected, will not at last depart from us, and give us up to final impenitence?

Beloved brethren, be persuaded—whatever be your age, be persuaded that the time past is abundantly sufficient for the course which you have followed the lusts of your flesh. And now, without any further delay, begin to "work the works of God."

Do you ask, "What is the work of God?" I answer, as our blessed Lord did, "This is the work of God, that you *believe*on Him whom he has sent, [John 6:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.28-29)." This is indeed the one great concern to which we would all attend. We are sinners, liable to God's wrath and eternal condemnation. But Jesus Christ is a Savior: he is sent into the world on purpose to seek and to save those who are lost. Then go to him; believe in him; implore mercy through him; cast yourselves upon him; and "cleave to him with full purpose of heart." Let the time which you have spent in the neglect of him be redeemed; and your efforts be the more urgent, in proportion to the time which you have lost.

As for the *baptized heathen*with whom you have associated, "come out from among them, [1 Corinthians 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.17)," and "no longer conform yourselves to their evil ways, [Romans 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.2)." They will, as the Apostle tells you, "think it strange that you continue not to run with them to the same excess of riot as you formerly did; and will speak evil of you on account of it, verse 4." Be it so. If this is an occasion of grief to you, it would not be on your own account, but on theirs; for "they shall surely give an account to him who is ready to judge both the living and dead, verse 5;" and "their hard ungodly speeches, which they have spoken against you" for his sake, will be visited upon them to their everlasting confusion, Jude verse 14, 15.

Mind yourselves: seek the salvation of your own souls, whether others will attend to their souls or not. Do not perish in Sodom, because your relatives mock at your fear of God's judgments! [Genesis 19:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 19.14). Neither linger in the plain, lest the storms of God's vengeance overtake you! But be in earnest: and "whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might! [Ecclesiastes 9:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 9.10)."

***~~#2406~~***

***~~NEARNESS TO DEATH, A MOTIVE TO WATCHFULNESS~~***

***~~[1 Peter 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.7)~~***

"The end of all things is at hand. Therefore be sober-minded, and watch unto prayer."

*The office of the Gospel is not to fill the mind with notions, but to renew the heart and sanctify the life.* It is true indeed, that the smallest conformity to Gospel precepts will cause us to be loaded with obloquy and derision by an ungodly world, verse 4; but it furnishes us with very sufficient motives to disregard the censures of men, and to devote ourselves unreservedly to God. The nearness of death and judgment is of itself an irresistible argument for maintaining an indifference to earthly things, and for exerting ourselves to the uttermost to secure a blessed eternity. Such is the scope of the Apostle's words; in commenting on which we shall notice,

***~~I. The declaration—~~***

It is possible that Peter, in speaking of "the end of all things," might have some reference to the destruction of Jerusalem, which was fast approaching, and to the consequent annihilation of the Jewish polity. But it is more probable that he referred to the end of the world, which was generally represented as so near, that Paul was obliged to rectify the mistake which had arisen in the minds of the Thessalonians with respect to it, [2 Thessalonians 2:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.2-3).

We may however, justly apply it as relating to the *hour of death*, which is to every man "the end of all things" here below. Death terminates our joys and honors, however elevated they may be. It also puts an end to our hopes and prospects, be they ever so bright and well-founded. It incapacitates us also for carrying into effect all our purposes and endeavors. We may have seen the vanity of earthly things, and have formed a resolution to withdraw our affections from them, and to prosecute with care the things belonging to our everlasting peace. We may have actually begun to execute our purposes: we may have begun to pay more attention to divine ordinances than we have done in past times, and to read some religious books, and to cultivate an acquaintance with some pious characters, in hopes of getting instruction from them, and of furthering thereby our eternal interests: but death will cut short all these good beginnings, and leave us cause to bewail to all eternity that we had deferred the concerns of our souls so long!

The very instant death comes, there is no more room for repentance; no more shall the tidings of salvation through the crucified Redeemer sound in our ears; no more will the Holy Spirit strive with us to bring us to God; the time for repentance is past; the offers of salvation are closed; the day of grace is come to an end; and nothing remains for the soul but to weep and bewail its folly in Hell forever and ever!

This period is near "at hand" to every one of us. If our life were prolonged to the age of Methuselah, the space would be only as the twinkling of an eye in comparison with eternity, [2 Peter 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.8); but our life is contracted to a very narrow span; nor can we be sure that it shall continue even to the expiration of the present day: so justly may it be said in reference to all of us, "The end of all things is at hand!"

The consideration of this solemn truth may well prepare us for,

***~~II. The exhortation grounded upon it—~~***

***~~1. Be sober-minded—~~***

Sober-mindedness does not merely import temperance with relation to food and drink, but moderation with regard to our desire of earthly things, or our enjoyment of them. Our minds are apt to be very strongly fixed on the things of time and sense; we are fascinated with the prospect of some pleasure, some honor, some emolument, for the attainment of which we labor day and night, and in the possession of which we are ready to say, "Soul, take your ease."

But would we do thus, if we considered how transient our enjoyment of them will be? Would we not rather sit loose to the things of this world, seeking them as though we sought them not, and using them as though we used them not, [1 Corinthians 7:29-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 7.29-31).

Let us then cultivate this spirit, [Philippians 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.5). We need not on this account relax our diligence in our earthly vocations; for diligence is our bounden duty, [Ecclesiastes 9:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 9.10), and will consist very well with the most devout mind, and most ardent exertions in the Lord's service, [Romans 12:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.11); but "the affections must be set on things above, and not on things below, [Colossians 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.2)."

***~~2. Watch unto prayer—~~***

Prayer is indispensably necessary for the salvation of the soul. Without prayer, we can obtain nothing from God:  
no pardon of sin,  
no strength for obedience,  
no preparation for eternity.

*If we live without prayer, we shall die without hope!* But it is no easy matter to persevere in prayer. We can complain to a fellow-creature with ease and fluency: but the moment we attempt to express our needs in prayer to God, our minds wander to the very ends of the earth, and our mouths are shut before him*. Any trifling occurrence is sufficient to divert us from prayer*,and we postpone this duty from time to time, under the idea of having some more favorable opportunity for the performance of it. But would it be thus with us, if we were duly impressed with the shortness and uncertainty of time? Even the most abandoned malefactors will weep and pray when their execution is drawing near: and should not we, if we felt that "the end of all things is at hand?"

Let us then watch against everything that may either divert us from prayer, or distract us in it. Yes, let us watch that our prayers be such as our necessities require, and such as God will accept. Let them be offered up with constancy, with fervor, and with faith. And the nearer we approach to our latter end, the more "abundant let us be in supplication and thanksgivings."

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

To the elderly part of this assembly, one would think it would be needless to add anything on this subject; for those who have already lived out half their days, must feel (one would imagine) that their "time is short." But, alas! even the aged need to be reminded of this obvious truth, and to be stirred up to improve their few remaining hours. Yes, even they often become more worldly with their advancing years, and manifest as great a backwardness to spiritual duties as they did in the earlier part of their existence. If one of this character be present, may God impress upon his mind a sense of his guilt and folly, and awaken him from his slumbers before it be too late!

To the younger part, who dream of months and years to come, it is more obviously necessary to repeat the warning in the text. You are apt to think and say, "There is time enough yet for me to seek after God." But "have you made a covenant with death?" have you been assured that neither disease nor accident shall cut you off in the bloom of life? Look around you, and see how many of your own age are gone within your remembrance. And what if death had seized on you, instead of them; where would you now be at this moment? I entreat you, if you have any regard for your own souls, consider this. Put the question to your conscience, and answer it faithfully in the sight of God: and then look at the direction given you by God himself: "Be sober-minded," and moderate in your attachment to the things of time; and "watch unto prayer," that you "may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory!"

***~~#2407~~***

***~~THE DUTY AND OFFICE OF CHRISTIAN LOVE~~***

**[1 Peter 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.8)**

"Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins."

The divine authority of our religion is fully established. Its external evidences demonstrate God to be its author; nor are its internal evidences less convincing.*The tendency of Christianity is to assimilate us to God's moral character.*All other religions have countenanced a vindictive spirit; but the religion of Jesus inculcates universal love. The New Testament lays the greatest stress upon this duty.

The injunction in the text proposes to our view,

***~~I. The duty inculcated—~~***

Many confine the sense of this term to almsgiving; but almsgiving is a very small part of what is implied in it. *Love includes the whole of our duty towards our neighbors,* [Romans 13:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 13.9).

***~~Christian love is our indispensable duty—~~***

Though an old commandment, it is enjoined as a new one, 1 [John 2:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.7-8). Obedience to it is a sure test of our conversion, [1 John 4:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.7-8); it is a good evidence of conversion to ourselves, [1 John 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.14); it is a satisfactory proof to others also, [John 13:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.35). A lack of love manifests us to be in an unregenerate state, [1 John 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.14).

***~~Christian love ought to be cordial and "fervent"—~~***

Worldly courtesy is but a faint image of Christian love. Love, if pure, and subordinate to God, cannot be too fervent. Our love of ourselves is the rule of love to others: our Lord's love to us is the pattern also of this duty, [1 John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.16).

***~~We should "above all things" cultivate Christian love—~~***

Love is the greatest of all Christian graces, 1 Corinthians 13:13. If we attain to it, we fulfill the law of Christ, [Romans 13:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 13.8); [Romans 13:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 13.10). But If we are destitute of it, nothing else will profit us, [1 Corinthians 13:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.1-3).

***~~The children of God should maintain Christian love "among themselves"—~~***

Benevolence is due even to our enemies. But there is an especial obligation in the saints to love each other, [Galatians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.10); their union with Christ, and with each other, demands it, [1 Corinthians 12:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 12.25).

To promote a more uniform attention to this duty, we will consider,

***~~II. The argument with which it is enforced—~~***

The Apostle's words may be considered as relating to:

***~~1. The sins of others—~~***

"To cover the sins" of others (extenuating what we cannot approve; concealing what we cannot but condemn; and throwing a veil over, not errors only, but "sins," yes, even "a multitude" of sins,) is the proper office of love, [1 Corinthians 13:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.7). The duty of love does not, however, preclude ministers from censuring, or magistrates from punishing, the sins of men: they perform those acts officially; and in performing them, they obey, instead of violating, the law of love.

But to men in their individual capacity, the text prescribes an invariable rule of duty. See [Matthew 18:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.22). From this office we should not depart, unless (as in the exercise of the ministerial or magisterial office) the honor of God, and the good of society, require it. A just regard to the great duty of love is of incalculable importance:

first, to ourselves; for how can we expect to have forbearance exercised towards us, if we refuse it to others?

Next, to the church; for how can the church be edified, if its members do not walk together in love?

And lastly, to the enemies of the Gospel, who will not fail to harden themselves in their iniquities, if evil reports in the church, and consequent dissensions and animosities, afford them any occasion.

*Christian forbearance will never be exercised as it ought, without a deeply-rooted principle of love.*When we hate a person, we are ready on all occasions to speak of his faults; but this is not the way in which we treat those whom we tenderly love. Therefore we should cultivate this principle in order to maintain a befitting conduct, [Proverbs 10:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 10.12).

***~~2. Our own sins—~~***

We must not, for one moment, think that our love, however fervent, can merit the pardon of our sins. Yet our pardon may be, and certainly is, suspended on the exercise of this divine principle. To this the whole Scriptures bear witness, [Matthew 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.7); [Matthew 6:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.14-15) and [Proverbs 16:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 16.6). See also [Galatians 6:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.7-8) and [1 Timothy 6:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.18-19), contrasted with [James 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.13). Daniel even goes so far as to counsel Nebuchadnezzar; and the words in the original most naturally bear this sense—to cover sins from the sight of God, so that they shall not be noticed in the final judgment. See [Psalm 32:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 32.1-2) and [Nehemiah 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 4.5). In [James 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.20), they will also bear that sense: and if we could divest ourselves of prejudice, we would more readily put that construction upon them in that passage; since it is not the converting of souls merely, but the love exercised in seeking to convert them, that entails this blessing on us. If we put a different construction upon them, we make them a mere tautology: but in the sense here affixed to them, they afford a strong additional motive for exertion. This sense of them also exactly accords with our Lord's description of the day of judgment, [Matthew 25:34-46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.34-46).

Moreover, in this view the Apostle's argument is far stronger than on the other construction of his words. Let it then operate as a strong incentive to mutual love, " For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, [Matthew 7:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.2).

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How justly reprehensible are the generality of Christians!~~***

There is a proneness in all to receive and propagate reports; but none are willing to have their own reputation blasted. Yet there are few who do not scatter defamation. Let us all be ashamed of and resist this sinful propensity; let us watch against every temptation or desire to indulge it; let us regulate our conduct by the law of love; let us study the Apostle's description of Christian love, [1 Corinthians 13:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.4-7); and let us attend to the exhortation of John, [1 John 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.18).

***~~2. How worthy of acceptance is the Gospel of Christ!~~***

*A sense of Christ's love to us, produces love to him.* When we love Christ aright, we shall love all his members, [1 John 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.1). This is the invariable effect wherever the Gospel prevails. The knowledge of our own sins, will make us tender towards others. The forgiveness we have received, will incline us to forgive others. The extent of Christ's love to us, will be the ground of our love to our fellow-sinners, [John 13:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.34). Let the Gospel then bring forth this fruit in our hearts and lives; we shall then experience the truth of that Divine assertion, "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! [Psalm 133:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 133.1)." In the exercise of Christian love is the foretaste of Heaven itself!

***~~#2408~~***

***~~PERSECUTION FOR CHRIST'S SAKE~~***

***~~[1 Peter 4:12-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.12-16)~~***

"Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name."

The quiet and repose which Christians enjoy at this day, may seem to render a discourse on the subject of persecution quite uninteresting. But the whole New Testament abounds with:  
warnings to expect it,  
encouragements to endure it,  
and directions how to conduct ourselves under it.

Nor is there any intimation given that this state of things was to be confined to the first ages, when Christianity was new in the world; or that "the offense of the cross would ever cease." On the contrary, we are taught to expect, that "those who are born after the flesh only, will hate those who are born after the Spirit;" and that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

The circumstance of Christianity having become our national religion, may justly be supposed to have abated somewhat of the fury of persecutors; while the protection afforded by the laws of the land keeps within bounds their hostility against those whom they hate for righteousness sake.

But I am not sure that much of *our repose may not be ascribed to the low state of piety among us*: and I cannot but think, that, if God were to pour out his Spirit upon us as he did on the primitive Church, and our light were to burn as bright as theirs, there would yet be found much the same rancor in the hearts of men against vital godliness now, as there was in former days. For there are not lacking at this hour many proofs of what men would do to suppress real piety, if the toleration accorded to us by the laws did not restrain them.

At all events, we know not what trials we ourselves personally may be called to endure, even though the Church at large would still continue to enjoy tranquility: and for these we ought to be prepared. The words before us are admirably calculated to fortify our minds against all that at any time may come upon us; since, while they teach us to expect persecution for righteousness sake, they show us,

***~~I. In what light we should view persecution—~~***

***~~"We should not think it strange, as though some strange thing happened unto us"—~~***

God has seen fit to ordain that his people would be subjected to "fiery trials," not only for the discovery of their graces, but also for the improvement of them. To them he has given a new nature, altogether different from that which they brought into the world with them—a nature, which for its excellence may be compared to gold: but there still remains in them much dross, which must be purged away: and, as gold is both ascertained and purified by the action of fire, so *must these be tried and purified in the furnace of affliction*.

Of course, their persecutors have no such object in view: they seek only to suppress the piety that offends them: but God has other, and very opposite, ends to accomplish. He seeks their advancement in the divine life, and will allow no heavier trial to assault them than what he has strengthened them to bear, and will overrule for their eternal welfare.

True it is that, notwithstanding he has taught us to expect these things, we are ready to account them strange: we think it strange that such trials would come upon us, and from such quarters, and on us who have done so little to deserve them. But we should remember, that "the same trials are accomplished also in our brethren who are in the world, [1 Peter 5:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.9);" and that "none have come upon us but what are common to man, nor any which God will not enable us to sustain, [1 Corinthians 10:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.13);" and under this conviction *we should receive persecutions as our divinely appointed lot, and submit to them as dispensations ordained by God for our eternal good.*

***~~We would rather regard it as a ground of joy—~~***

On this subject there is but one testimony throughout all the Holy Scriptures. Our blessed Lord says, "If you be persecuted for righteousness' sake—rejoice and leap for joy." Paul tells us, that the true Christian will "glory in tribulations, [Romans 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.3);" and that he himself actually "took pleasure in them" from the consideration that Christ's strength would thereby be displayed and glorified, [2 Corinthians 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.10). James bids us "count it all joy when we fall into manifold trials:" and gives it as his deliberate judgment, "We count them happy that endure, [James 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.2); [James 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.11)." Peter, as this whole epistle informs us, had the same view of the subject: and therefore we feel warranted in saying to all of you, "If you are reproached for the name of Christ, happy are you."

In confirmation of this sentiment, I proceed to show,

***~~II. What reason we have for viewing it in that light—~~***

Certainly it appears strange and paradoxical that the most cruel persecution for Christ's sake would be considered as a ground of joy. But this view of it is just; for, when we suffer for Christ's sake:

***~~1. We are made "partakers of Christ's sufferings"—~~***

We all know, that if any part of the human body suffers, whether the head or members, the whole participates in the pain. Now the Lord Jesus Christ is the head of his mystical body, and we are the members: and when he suffered on the cross, we suffered with him; as it is written, "We are crucified with Christ;" "we died with him;" "we were buried with him, [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20). [Romans 6:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.4); [Romans 6:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.8)." So when we suffer, he suffers, as it were, with us: as he said, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me? [Acts 9:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.4)." "In all our afflictions, he is afflicted, [Isaiah 63:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 63.9);" and "he who touches us, touches the apple of his eye, [Zechariah 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 2.8)."

As far as respects a penal atonement made for sin, he suffered alone: but, that we may be conformed to his image in all things, he has ordained that his Church would complete and "fill up the measure of his sufferings:" so that, though in his own person he is beyond the reach of man's cruelty, he is still enduring much from it in the persons of his people.

In truth, it is not on their own account that his people suffer anything. If we would but renounce our allegiance to him, the world would find no more occasion against us.*It is for His sake that they hate us. They hate not us, but Christ in us*: nor do they persecute us, but Christ in us. Therefore our sufferings are his; and, in enduring them, "we are truly partakers of his sufferings."

Now then I would ask, "If when he drank the bitter cup even to the dregs, and left, as it were, but a drop for us to taste—shall we account it a hard matter to put it to our lips for his sake?" No! we should rather rejoice that an opportunity is afforded us of so testifying our love to him.

***~~2. The Spirit of God within our bosom, supports and comforts us—~~***

The Spirit is here called "The Spirit of glory and of God;" as being one with the Father, who is "the God of glory, [Acts 7:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.2);" and one with the Son, who is "the Lord of glory, [1 Corinthians 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.8)." His office it is to descend and dwell with the saints, as their Comforter, [John 14:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.16). And when we really suffer for Christ's sake, it is both an evidence that he does rest upon us, and a pledge that he will be with us in a more abundant measure. If the Holy Spirit had not already wrought faith in our hearts, and put somewhat of the image of Christ upon our souls, the world would have allowed us to rest in peace: for "if we were of the world, the world would love its own; but because we are not of the world, but Christ has chosen us out of the world, therefore the world hates us, [John 15:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.19)." But the enmity of the world on account of what we have received from this divine Agent, only serves to call down upon us yet richer communications of divine love, even such as shall be sufficient to bear us up under our trials, and to make us conquerors over all our enemies.

And shall not this reconcile us to sufferings? Or, would any trials be deprecated, which are productive of so great a benefit? If the loss of Christ's bodily presence was a proper ground of joy to the disciples, because of the presence of the comforter, who would come to them in his stead, [John 16:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.6-7), then much more may any loss or any trials be welcomed by us, if they may but lead to a more abundant effusion of this divine Spirit upon our souls.

***~~3. God is particularly glorified in us—~~***

Doubtless, on the part of the persecutors, God is dishonored and blasphemed; but on the part of the sufferers he is glorified. Behold a man enduring sufferings for righteousness sake: what does he say to all who behold him? In respect of words, he may be silent, as a lamb before its shearers: but by his actions, he proclaims in accents that cannot be misunderstood, "My Lord is worthy of all this: never can I show my love to him sufficiently: if I had a thousand lives, they would be well disposed of in his service: I am ready to bear anything for him; and am so far from regretting that my love is thus put to the test, that I am thankful for it, inasmuch as it gives me an opportunity of evincing my sense of his excellency, and the ardor of my love towards him."

In another view, too, his sufferings advance the glory of God; because *they show how powerful that grace must be, which enables a poor feeble worm to bear them, yes, and to rejoice and glory in them*. Many persecutors have been perfectly amazed at the patience of the saints under the most cruel torments that could be inflicted on them: and have been led by the very conduct of the sufferers, not only to embrace the principles which were so mighty in operation, but even to subject themselves to the same torments which they themselves had inflicted upon them.

How does divine grace triumph on such occasions as these! And who would not be willing to suffer, if only Christ might be so magnified, and the efficacy of his grace be so displayed! [Philippians 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.20). [2 Corinthians 4:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.10-11).

***~~4. Our eternal happiness is augmented—~~***

Soon will that Savior who once died upon the cross come again in his glory to judge the world. Then will he gather together his elect from every quarter of the world; and bestow on them that recompense of reward, to which, while suffering for his sake, they had looked forward. He had told them beforehand, that "if they suffered with him, then they would also be glorified together." He had told them, that their light and momentary afflictions would work for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Even while they were in this life, he had given them a hundred-fold for all that they had lost or endured for his sake: but then will be the time for their "full reward."

Tell me then, I beg you: Will Moses in that day regret that he had "esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt?" Or will those feel any regret, who, "when tortured, would not accept deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection?" Will any of the Apostles regret that they sealed the truth with their blood? Or will any of you regret that you were "faithful unto death, when God shall put upon your heads the crown of life?" No! one moment of that joy will far overbalance whole years of pain. What then will not be our triumph through all eternity!

But, as this subject may be misapplied, let me show you,

***~~III. What we should especially guard against, in relation to it—~~***

***~~We must not bring trials on ourselves by any misconduct of our own—~~***

It is possible enough, that a wild enthusiast may imagine himself at liberty to disregard all human laws, and, while suffering for the violation of them, may conceive himself to be bearing the cross of Christ. Even war itself has been waged, under the idea of its being a service acceptable to God! And within our own memory has a spirit of insubordination and rebellion been too lightly cherished under the cloak of religion. But when persons reap the just reward of such bad conduct, so far are they from honoring God, that they greatly dishonor him, and expose religion itself to hatred and contempt.

The being "a busy-body in other men's matters," is no uncommon character among those who profess religion; and who indulge an assuming, prying, officious spirit, under the idea of rendering a service to God and man.

We may also yet more commonly see among professors a neglect of their own proper calling; an intrusion into the callings of others; a substitution of services which do not belong to them, in the place of others which are proper to their situation; an impatience of reproof; an unfitting pertness towards their superiors; and a self-will that knows no bounds.

Ah, brethren! if you suffer for such conduct as this, do not think that you are to expect any recompense at the hands of God. The cross which you are called to bear is not Christ's, but your own: and what is inflicted on you by man is only a prelude of a yet sorer punishment that shall be inflicted on you by God, even by that God whom you profess to serve, but whose name you dishonor, and whose displeasure you incur.

***~~But, if we suffer really as Christians, we may rejoice in all that we endure—~~***

Our enemies may think that they load us with disgrace: but shame in such a cause is no shame: it is honor: and we may take it up, and bind it on us as a diadem. The Apostles, when imprisoned and scourged for the truth's sake, "went out from their persecutors, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Christ!" And thus may we do, turning the very indignities that are cast upon us into an occasion of praise to God. Thus "out of the eater we shall bring forth meat, and out of the strong we shall bring forth sweetness."

***~~Two hints, as rising from this subject, I would beg permission to suggest:~~***

***~~1. In embracing the gospel, be unshakable—~~***

The gospel, sooner or later, will subject you to trials: for our Lord has plainly warned us, that, "if we will be his disciples, we must deny ourselves, and take up our cross, and follow him." He tells us farther, that, "if we hate not father and mother, and even life itself, for his sake, we cannot be his disciples." Then, before we profess ourselves to be his people, we should "count the cost:" we should consider, whether we are willing to "part with all for the pearl of great price."

To what trials we may be subjected, we know not; but we must be prepared for the worst. For I have no hesitation in saying, that it were better never to follow Christ at all, than to follow him for a season, and then turn back from him: "It were better never to have known the way of righteousness, than, after having known it, to turn away from it: for the last end of such a man is worse than his beginning."

***~~2. In maintaining the gospel, be firm—~~***

If persecution arise for righteousness' sake, you must not be thinking how you may escape it, so much as how you may glorify God under it. You should not for a moment think of conciliating your enemies by any sinful concession. Your duty to God must be paramount to every other consideration. Your great concern must be, to approve yourselves faithful to him. The three Hebrew Youths with the fiery furnace in their view, and Daniel in expectation of the den of lions, thought of nothing but their duty to their God. So you must fear God, and God alone. And, if it pleases God that you would be called to martyrdom itself, be content to "go through much tribulation in your way to the kingdom;" and to ascend to Heaven in a chariot of fire.

***~~#2409~~***

***~~THE END OF UNBELIEVERS~~***

***~~[1 Peter 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.17)~~***

"What shall the end be of those who do not obey the Gospel of God?"

Many are the troubles of the righteous: and though their afflictions are not *penal*—yet they are for the most part to be considered as *paternal chastisements*, and as the judgments which God inflicts on his own household with a view to their advancement in faith and holiness.

On the other hand, the enemies of God often triumph, and revel in a fullness of all earthly enjoyments. But the intelligent Christian will see in these dispensations the certainty of a future retribution, when the wicked shall receive the just reward of their wickedness, and he himself be exalted to an inconceivable state of bliss. He will argue thus: If God so afflicts his children in the day of his mercy, then how will he punish his enemies in the day of his wrath. And, if he so prospers his enemies and load them with benefits in this valley of tears, then what prosperity and happiness must he have reserved for his friends in the regions of glory! If crowns and kingdoms be the portion of many who disregard and despise him, what shall be the inheritance of those who honor and obey him!

Such is the Apostle's mode of arguing in our text; where, speaking of the trials sustained by Christians, he says, if God's *paternal chastisements*be so severe, then what must his vindictive judgments be? If judgment first begins at the house of God, then what shall the end be of those who do not obey the Gospel of God?

To impress this solemn consideration upon our minds, we shall show,

***~~I. Who they are that obey not the Gospel—~~***

***~~To ascertain this, it will be proper to state briefly what the Gospel requires—~~***

The Gospel supposes men to be in a state of guilt and misery, liable to the wrath of God, and incapable of delivering themselves from it. It proposes to them a remedy of God's appointment: it sets forth Jesus as an all-sufficient Savior; and declares that sinners of every description may be washed in his blood, and renewed by his Spirit. But, if we will not apply to him by faith, and thankfully accept his offered benefits, then the gospel dooms us to destruction under the aggravated guilt of despising, and trampling under foot the Son of God. The commission which our Lord gave to his disciples, [Mark 16:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 16.15-16), and the answer given by Paul to the awakened jailer, [Acts 16:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.30-31), abundantly confirm this view of the Gospel, and show that a cordial acceptance of Christ as our only Lord and Savior is the sum and substance of a Christian's duty.

According to this statement, very many will be found disobedient to the Gospel:

***~~1. Those who neglect Christ altogether—~~***

This is so obvious a truth that the mention of it seems needless and absurd: but experience proves that the most abandoned sinners, and most avowed infidels, are often insensible of the guilt which they contract. Be it known however, that their excuses or objections will avail them nothing in the day of judgment: *their whole lives were one continued act of disobedience to the Gospel*; and they will most assuredly be numbered among the enemies of their incarnate God. Their rejection of him, whether in principle or practice, will be a decisive evidence of their guilt.

***~~2. They who unite something else with him as a foundation for their hope of salvation—~~***

The Gospel requires us to renounce all dependence on our own works. However good our works be, they must never for one moment be considered as justifying us before God, either in whole or in part. In Christ alone must be all our hope; and if we attempt to unite anything of ours with his perfect righteousness, we shall not only not add to our security, but shall altogether invalidate all which Christ himself has done for us. Paul asserts this in the plainest terms, [Galatians 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.2); [Galatians 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.4); and from the fullest conviction of its truth desired to be found in Christ, clad with his righteousness, and his alone, [Philippians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.9).

***~~3. Those who, while they profess to follow Christ, dishonor him by their conduct—~~***

Many there are who with apparent zeal cry, *Lord, Lord!*who yet are far from doing the things which he commands. Many, alas! "profess to know him, but in their works deny him:" they are observant of outward duties, but inattentive to their spirit and temper: instead of being meek and lowly, patient and forgiving, and solicitous only to honor God—they are proud and passionate, covetous and worldly, and studious rather to be thought Christians than really to deserve the name. Let such know that they "amidst all their appearances of religion deceive themselves, and their religion is vain, [James 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.26)." By neglecting to walk as Christ walked, they disobey the Gospel, as much as if they rejected him altogether.

To awaken such from their slumbers, we proceed to show,

***~~II. What their end shall be—~~***

The peculiar manner in which the Apostle speaks of their "end," intimates that:

***~~1. It will be dreadful beyond expression—~~***

In the text Peter infers from the trials which God allows to come upon believers here—the far greater miseries that shall be endured by unbelievers hereafter. But his very mode of suggesting this inference shows that the two states could scarcely admit of any comparison: for *what are any transient pains of body inflicted by the most ingenious cruelty of man, when compared with the eternal torments both of soul and body, which will be inflicted on the wicked by the hand of a holy and incensed God!*

Paul institutes a similar comparison, and like Peter, leaves our imagination to supply what no language could possibly express, [Hebrews 10:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.29). There are indeed terms used in Scripture to represent to us the misery of the damned. They are represented as "cast into a lake of fire and brimstone," "where the worm of an accusing conscience dies not, and the fire of God's wrath is never quenched;" they "weep and wail and gnash their teeth;" and the "smoke of their torment ascends up forever and ever." But, awful as these expressions are, they convey no adequate idea of the misery sustained by those who have perished in unbelief: we must say of that, as Paul says of the things he heard and saw in the third heavens, that it is unutterable! [2 Corinthians 12:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.4).

***~~2. It will be dreadful beyond a doubt—~~***

The Apostle appeals to our own consciences for the truth of the inference which he suggests. He says, in effect: What must the state of unbelievers be? Can it be the same with that of obedient believers? Will God put no difference between those who serve him, and those who serve him not? Has not the Scripture plainly declared the end of those who disobey the Gospel? And are we not constrained to acknowledge the equity of that sentence, which the despisers of Christ are taught to expect? Shall an angel from Heaven be accursed, if he presume to preach any other Gospel, [Galatians 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.8), and shall we escape with impunity, if we reject this? Our wishes are doubtless in opposition to the declarations of God; but in our judgment we must approve of them; and we shall surely be silent in the day that they shall be enforced, even though we ourselves are *the wretched monuments of God's displeasure.*

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

***~~1. How to judge of our state before God—~~***

Mere morality is by no means a sufficient criterion whereby to judge of our state: we may be free from gross violations of God's law, and yet be far from yielding obedience to the Gospel. Let us then inquire whether we are obeying the Gospel by a simple dependence upon Christ, and by a spirit and temper suited to our profession? This is the test to which we must bring ourselves, since we shall be tried by it at the last day. In vain will be our morality, if Christ is not our only foundation; and *in vain will be our professed adherence to Christ, if we do not adorn the Gospel by a holy conduct*. Let us then examine ourselves, that we may know beforehand what our end shall be.

***~~2. The importance of considering our latter end—~~***

We are ready enough to contemplate the circumstances to which we look forward in the present life; but*O, how backward are we to reflect upon our latter end!*Yet the events of this present life are not worthy of a thought in comparison with eternity. I beg you, brethren, consider how fast your end is approaching, and what it is likely to be, an eternity of bliss in Heaven—or an eternity of misery in Hell? O, lose not an hour in preparing for your great account! and be careful so to pass through things temporal, that you finally lose not the things eternal!

***~~#2410~~***

***~~THE DIFFICULTY OF SALVATION~~***

**[1 Peter 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.18)**

"If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"

Earnestness in the concerns of religion is often thought unnecessary; but the attainment of salvation is by no means easy. This appears from the representations which the Scriptures give of religion: a race, a warfare, a fight, etc.

The difficulties implied in these metaphors may well alarm the careless. With this view Peter suggests the solemn query in the text.

***~~I. His assumption—~~***

The Apostle did not mean to express a doubt, but rather to assume a position which he deemed incontrovertible. The point he assumes is, that the righteous are saved with difficulty.

The truth of this position will appear, if it is considered that:

***~~1. The righteous are not saved without deep afflictions—~~***

God's people are for the most part poor and afflicted, [Zephaniah 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zeph 3.12). They have much to endure on account of their religion, 2 Timothy 3:12; and trials are for the most part necessary to their growth in grace, [1 Peter 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.7). If they were without affliction of some kind, they would have reason to doubt whether they were God's children indeed, [Hebrews 12:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.8). *Trials are to them, as the furnace to the gold, to purge them from their dross*, and to fit them for the service of their God, [Hebrews 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.10).

***~~2. The righteous are not saved without severe conflicts—~~***

None have made such high attainments, but they still have conflicts to maintain with Satan, [Ephesians 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.12), and their indwelling corruptions, [Romans 7:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.15); [Romans 7:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.23); it is by these that God keeps them humble, [2 Corinthians 12:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.7). The images by which vital religion is set forth (as running, wrestling, fighting,) sufficiently attest the truth of my position. As long as two principles remain within us, our conflicts must remain, [Galatians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.17).

***~~3. The righteous are not saved without powerful assistances—~~***

Who can get to Heaven without them, or even do anything that is good without them? The aid we need, is such as nothing but Omnipotence can supply, [Ephesians 1:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.19-20); if ever we be kept at all, it must be by the power of God himself, [1 Peter 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.5).

A very slight view of the fact assumed, will suffice to show us the reasonableness of,

***~~II. The appeal he founds upon it—~~***

The appeal is stronger than any mere assertion, inasmuch as it makes every man a judge in his own cause. It clearly intimates that:

***~~1. The perdition of the ungodly is most certain—~~***

The ungodly, no less than the godly, will be summoned to the judgment-seat of Christ; but the two will be separated as sheep from the goats, and widely different portions will be assigned unto them, [Psalm 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 1.5). How can it be supposed to be otherwise, when the difference of their characters is considered? *If Hell is not an abode fit for the godly, much less is Heaven a proper residence for the ungodly.*

***~~2. The perdition of the ungodly is most reasonable—~~***

We confidently appeal even to the ungodly themselves. If such troubles as are often inflicted on the righteous be permitted by God as the beneficial chastisements of his friends, what shall be inflicted by God as the vindictive punishments of his enemies? If such things come on his friends in this state of probation, then what shall come on his enemies at the time appointed for final retribution? If such be the visitations experienced by his friends in the day of his mercy, then what must his enemies expect in the day of his wrath? Truly I shall wonder if the conscience of any man be either so blind or so obdurate, as not to feel the force of this appeal. If there be such a hardened sinner, let him consult, and provide an answer to, other similar appeals to Holy Writ, [Hebrews 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.3); To "die without mercy" is bad enough; but there is a "much sorer punishment" awaiting his wretched soul! [Hebrews 10:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.28-29).

***~~See—~~***

***~~1. How desirable it is to ascertain your true character—~~***

Surely it is no difficult matter to ascertain to which of the two aforementioned classes you belong. Surely you may soon learn whether you are living in the daily habit of penitence, and faith, and unreserved obedience to your God. If God is true, then your eternal state shall correspond with your present character, whatever it may be, [Isaiah 3:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 3.10-11).

***~~2. What is that line of conduct which common prudence demands—~~***

If there were no future state, you might go on in your own ways without much concern; but if repentance, faith, and obedience are essential constituents of the character of the righteous, say, whether it be wise to disregard, or even to defer them? The world may deride a life of piety as folly; but it is true wisdom: yes, "the fear of the Lord is the very beginning of wisdom." Let every one then seek that righteousness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

***~~#2411~~***

***~~ADVICE TO THE PERSECUTED OR TEMPTED~~***

**[1 Peter 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.19)**

"So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good."

God has mercifully engaged to save his chosen people at the last. They may however meet with many severe conflicts along their way. Nor are they to expect to he saved but with great difficulty. Nevertheless they may safely commit themselves to God, in hope of a happy outcome out of all their trials. Hence the Apostle suggests, in a way of inference, the advice in the text.

We propose to show,

***~~I. What Christians must expect to suffer—~~***

Though all are not called to bear the cross in the same degree—yet all should be prepared to suffer,

***~~1. In their reputation—~~***

That "fear of God" which the Scriptures represent to be "the beginning of wisdom," the world considers as the summit of folly. However wise, learned, or discreet any man may be—he cannot escape the imputation of weakness or wild enthusiasm, if he will "follow the Lord fully." If our Lord and Master was called Beelzebub, his servants can expect no better name.

***~~2. In their property—~~***

In former times the saints have frequently "suffered the loss of all things:" nor is it uncommon now for friends, and even parents, to withdraw their kindness from godly persons on account of their religion. Who does not know that eminent piety is a bar, rather than a help, to secular promotion? "They then who would be Christ's disciples, must forsake all, and follow him."

***~~3. In their liberty and life—~~***

Through the tender mercy of our God we are protected by the laws of the land: but none can tell what changes may yet arise: multitudes even in this kingdom have suffered death for Christ's sake; and, whether called to this trial or not, we would be prepared for it.

To reconcile us to these dispositions, we proceed to show,

***~~II. Why it is the will of God that we should suffer—~~***

God is pleased to permit it,

***~~1. For the trial of our faith—~~***

God can discern our graces, though we should have no opportunity to exercise them; but, if they are not called forth into act, neither have we the comfort of them, nor God the glory of them. Hence God permits "the fiery trial to try us," that he may reveal both to ourselves and others "what great things he has done for us."

***~~2. For the advancement of our graces—~~***

Our graces almost invariably languish when our outward circumstances are easy; but in seasons of difficulty they put forth themselves with strength: though Jesus needed no such stimulus—yet even he was "made perfect through sufferings;" and it is for the accomplishment of the same end, that God has made our road to lie "through much tribulation."

***~~3. For the manifestation of his own glory—~~***

The patience of the saints is a ground of astonishment to the unbelieving world; and the supports which God administers to them fills their hearts with gratitude towards him. But *what bursts of praise will resound from the myriads of his redeemed, when all the wonders of his love shall be universally and completely known!*

Satisfied with these appointments of the Deity, let us inquire,

***~~III. What our conduct should be when called to suffer—~~***

The best of men may be brought, as it were, "to their wit's end". But the advice in the text is the most proper that can be given:

***~~1. Let us "commit our souls to God's care and keeping"—~~***

We must not attempt to stand in our own strength: nothing less than God's wisdom and power can defeat the conspiracy that is formed against us: we should make him therefore the manager of our cause, and "the keeper" of our souls.

***~~2. Let us at the same time persist "in well-doing"—~~***

We must neither be irritated to do evil, nor deterred from doing good. The more we are persecuted for the sake of Christ, the more studious we should be "to put our enemies to silence by well-doing:" the very efforts of the enemy to extinguish our light would cause it to shine the brighter.

***~~3. Let us, above all, confide in God "as our faithful Creator"—~~***

God has promised to "keep the feet of his saints;" and he will perform it: we should suffer nothing to rob us of this confidence: if we "trust firmly in him, we shall be like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved."

***~~#2412~~***

***~~HUMILITY INCULCATED~~***

***~~[1 Peter 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.5)~~***

"All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

As *words are nothing more than sounds whereby to convey ideas*, it may seem of little importance what words are used, provided that the ideas annexed to them are sufficiently distinct. But I conceive that the adopting of a word which was in use among the unenlightened heathen, and continuing to use it as they did, when from the superior light of Christianity, we know that all the opinions and feelings originally annexed to it were bad, has a direct tendency to counteract the Gospel, and to perpetuate the darkness of heathenism in the land.

I refer here to the word pride; which is frequently used in common conversation, and at the bar, and in the senate, yes and even in the pulpit too, in a good sense; as "a just pride," and "an honest pride." But I know no passage of Scripture that sanctions the feelings which are associated with that term: or, if the term be so explained as to convey nothing but what is consistent with Christianity, still I conceive that such a use of it is highly inexpedient, because it tends to foster in the mind an approbation of opinions which are in direct opposition to the morality of the Gospel.

Humility is the grace which alone befits the Christian; and the cherishing of any feeling contrary to humility, will, as the Apostle informs us in my text, expose us to God's heaviest displeasure.

In confirmation of this, I will endeavor to unfold,

***~~I. The duty here enjoined—~~***

Humility is not a mere isolated grace, if I may so speak, like patience, or meekness, or any other virtue—but a feeling which pervades the whole man, and is called forth into exercise with every grace. Humility is that to the Christian, which holiness is to the Deity. Holiness is not a distinct attribute of the Deity, like justice, or mercy, or power—but a perfection that is blended with all the other attributes, and is the crown and glory of them all.

Just so, humility is the warp in the Christian's loom: and all other graces, whether of a cheerful or somber hue—are the woof, by which the piece is diversified: but from beginning to end, humility pervades it all. On this account, I must speak of humility in a large and extended view, and notice it in all its actings, whether towards God or man.

But there is another reason why this grace must be thus extensively considered; namely, that the Apostle himself here speaks of it in this comprehensive view. If we look at the words which precede my text, we shall find that humility is spoken of as exercised towards men: but in the words immediately following my text, it is connected with our duty to God: "All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time."

Let us then notice this grace,

***~~1. As exercised towards GOD—~~***

Here humility must begin. We cannot have one spark of real humility until we are abased before God, as guilty, helpless, and undone creatures, who have no hope but in the tender mercy of God in Christ Jesus. We must, as far as respects all hope in ourselves, feel ourselves in the very condition of the fallen angels, whose sin we have followed, and whose punishment we are doomed to share. Indeed, indeed, this is our very state, whether we know it or not: and it befits us to seek the knowledge of it, and to live under a sense of it every day, and all the day long.

We should never appear either before God or man in any other dress than this. It was the clothing of holy Job when in his most perfect state, [Job 42:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.5-6); and so far ought we to be from putting it off because God is reconciled towards us, that a sense of our acceptance with him through Christ should operate as an additional motive for making it the one continual habit of our minds, [Ezekiel 16:63](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 16.63). We should incessantly lie low before him in dust and ashes, and rely altogether upon "his mercy to pardon us, and his grace to help us in every time of need."

***~~2. As exercised towards MEN—~~***

I forbear to mention any other exercises of this grace towards God, in order that I may keep the subject as simple and clear as I can. But in viewing its exercises towards man, I must of necessity diversify it somewhat more. Its chief actings will be found to consist in the following things:

We must regard ourselves as the lowest of all.

We must be willing to be treated by others as the lowest of all.

We must gladly execute the basest offices, as the lowest of all.

**We must regard ourselves as the lowest of all**, "esteeming others better than ourselves, [Philippians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.3)," and "preferring them in honor before ourselves, [Romans 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.10)," and being ready in all places, and on all occasions, to "take the lowest place, [Luke 14:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.10)." It is not indeed necessary that we should accuse ourselves of sins which we have not committed, or deny the superiority of virtue to vice: but we should have such a sense of the peculiar advantages we have enjoyed, and the infinite obligations we lie under, and the consequent aggravations that have attended the many evils which we have committed, that we would account ourselves "less than the least of all saints, [Ephesians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.8)," yes, the very "chief of sinners! [1 Timothy 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.15)."

**We must be willing to be treated by others as the lowest of all.**It is only from pride and a conceit of something good in us, that we are induced to lay to heart the contempt and ignominy that are cast upon us. If we are sincere in abhorring ourselves, it will be a small matter to us that we are abhorred by others.

*David*deserved not the reproaches of his wife Michal: but, when he heard them, instead of being moved with indignation against her, he meekly replied, "I will be yet more vile than thus, and will be base in my own sight, [2 Samuel 6:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 6.22)."

It was but a small matter to the holy *Apostles*, that they were considered "as the filth of the world, and the off-scouring of all things, [1 Corinthians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.13);" they knew that they deserved nothing but wrath and indignation at the hands of God; and, having obtained mercy of the Lord, they cared not what treatment they met with at the hands of men.

To be rendered conformable to our Divine Master in the bitterest reproaches, or the most ignominious death, will, if we are truly humble, be a matter rather of joy and gratitude than of sorrow and complaint.

**We must gladly execute the basest offices, as the lowest of all.** To become "the servant of all, [Mark 10:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 10.44)." must be our highest ambition. Even the Lord of Glory himself, in the days of his flesh, came not to be ministered unto, but to minister: and this he did, even to the "washing of his disciples' feet, [John 11:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.13-14);" yes, though he was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God—yet he took upon him the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." "This is the mind that should be in us, [Philippians 2:5-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.5-8);" and this is the example which, as far as circumstances will admit of it, we should follow. Here is the perfection of humility: and this is the grace which every one of us should be putting on from day to day.

Nothing can more strongly mark the importance of this duty, than,

***~~II. The considerations with which it is enforced—~~***

The declaration, that "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble," is cited from the book of Proverbs: and, that it deserves especial attention, is evident from this; that James, as well as Peter, adduces it for the warning and instruction of every Christian. See [James 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.6).

***~~1. "God resists the proud"—~~***

He does so: he abhors the very persons of the proud: "they are an abomination to him! [Proverbs 6:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 6.16-17);" he perfectly scorns them! [Proverbs 3:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.34). This is the passage that is cited both by Peter and James. He "knows them afar off," as objects whom he disdains to look upon! [Psalm 138:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 138.6).

He will not hear any prayer that they may offer up. See the Pharisee and the Publican. You would imagine that a man who could make such appeals to God, respecting his manifold and self-denying services, would surely find acceptance at the throne of grace; while a man so conscious of his vileness as the Publican was, and with so little to say in his own behalf, would, comparatively at least, be disregarded. But the very reverse was the case; for "the tax collector went down to his house justified rather than the other." This is declared to be the universal rule of God's procedure; for that "every one who exalts himself shall be abased; but he, and he only, who humbles himself, shall be exalted! [Luke 18:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.14)."

Nor will God communicate to proud persons any spiritual blessing. Instead of drawing them to himself, "he will scatter the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He will fill the hungry with good things, but the rich he will send empty away, [Luke 1:51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.51); [Luke 1:53](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.53)." Their "esteeming themselves to be rich and increased in goods, and to have need of nothing, when they are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked," renders them perfectly disgusting in his sight: and the higher they are in their own estimation, the more he nauseates and abhors them! [Revelation 3:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.16-17).

But this is not all; for he will surely fight against them, to bring them down. Nebuchadnezzar from his own experience attested, that "those who walk in pride, God is able to abase;" and he might with truth have added also, is determined to abase. For the Prophet Isaiah has plainly warned us, that "the lofty looks of men shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down; and the Lord alone shall be exalted. For the day of the Lord Almighty shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low, [Isaiah 2:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 2.11-12)."

Now, I beg you, let this consideration be duly weighed, in order that you may with zeal and earnestness address yourselves to the duty that is here inculcated. If you bring not a broken and contrite spirit before God, and if you exercise not a spirit of meekness and lowliness before men—do not think that God will ever look with delight upon you, or acknowledge himself as your friend: for assuredly he is, and will be, your enemy, and will sooner or later resent the dishonor which you do unto him. He may not inflict on you such judgments as he did on Nebuchadnezzar or on Herod: if he only leaves you to yourselves, you will soon find what an evil and bitter thing it is to cherish such a disposition in your hearts! For, as "pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall, [Proverbs 16:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 16.18)," you may expect the effects of a spiritual dereliction; you may expect, that, "being lifted up with pride, you will fall into the condemnation of the devil! [1 Timothy 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 3.6)."

***~~2. God "gives grace to the humble"—~~***

What will he not do for those who are of a humble and contrite spirit? If there were but one such object in the whole universe, God would look through all the shining ranks of angels that surround his throne, and fix his eyes on him! [Isaiah 66:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.2). He would even come down to him, and dwell with him; yes, and dwell with him for the express purpose of comforting and reviving his drooping soul, [Isaiah 57:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.15). If he offered up a *prayer*, God would hear and answer it, [Job 33:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 33.27-28). If, on any sudden emergency, he only poured forth a *cry*, God would attend to it, and not forget it [Psalm 9:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 9.12). If there were only a *desire*in his heart, even that would be noted, in order to satisfy and fulfill it, [Psalm 10:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 10.17).

See this exemplified in King *Josiah*. God had determined to destroy Jerusalem: but because Josiah was of a humble spirit, he would first take him to himself, and not allow him to witness the calamities which were coming upon his nation: "Because your heart was tender, and you did humble yourself before God, when you heard his words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and humbled yourself before me, and rent your clothes, and wept before me, I have even heard you also, says the Lord, [2 Chronicles 34:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 34.27)."

See it yet more strongly illustrated in the case of the most wicked man that perhaps ever existed upon the face of the earth, the man that made the very streets of Jerusalem to run down with the blood of innocents, and set up his idols in the very House of God! See it, I say, in the case of King *Manasseh*; of whom it is said, "When he was in distress, he sought the favor of the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers." Behold! of this man it is said, "And when he prayed to Him, the LORD was moved by his entreaty and listened to his plea, [2 Chronicles 33:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 33.12-13)."

Say now, whether here be not encouragement enough to seek humility? Find a humble person to whom God ever refused any thing. You cannot. A humble person may be "cast down for a time; but he shall soon be lifted up: for God will save the humble person, [Job 22:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 22.29)."

***~~What shall I then add to these considerations?~~***

You need no other inducement to work either upon your hopes or fears. To have God your enemy, determined to "resist you," would be the greatest evil that could befall you!

But to have him as your friend, pledged to supply you with all the blessings of grace and glory, would be the summit of human bliss!

Commending then this alternative to your most devout meditations, I would say to all of you, in the animated language of the prophet, "Awake, awake, put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city, [Isaiah 52:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 52.1)." *There is nothing so "befitting to one of God's elect, as humbleness of mind*, [Colossians 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.12)," nor any ornament he can wear so pleasing to his God [1 Peter 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.4). Come then, beloved, and clothe yourselves with humility; and wear it so at all times, that you may be known by it, as a man is by his accustomed dress. So shall "God be glorified in you," and all who behold you be compelled to "acknowledge, that God is with you of a truth."

***~~#2413~~***

***~~THE DUTY OF CASTING OUR CARE ON GOD~~***

***~~[1 Peter 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.7)~~***

"Cast all your cares upon Him; for He cares for you."

Inexperienced Christians are generally partial in their views of religion. They often exalt one duty, to the neglect, if not the exclusion of another: but proficiency in the divine life will discover itself by the united exercise of the various, and apparently opposite, graces. Faith will not exclude fear, nor meekness fortitude. Every grace will be limited and tempered by some other grace. The soul must be humbled before God in dust and ashes: yet it should rely on him with most implicit confidence, verses 6, 7.

***~~I. The duty of Christians—~~***

Christians have learned "not to seek great things for themselves." Hence they are free from the corroding cares of avarice and ambition.

***~~But they still have many grounds of care—~~***

They cannot but feel some concern respecting their bodily needs: the accidents of life may also occasion some uneasiness; but they have other cares far more weighty and important. They feel within themselves also "an evil heart of unbelief; nor are they ignorant of Satan's devices to overthrow them. Moreover they frequently anticipate future evils; and tremble, lest in the day of adversity they would faint. Thus do they torment themselves with anxious and desponding fears.

***~~It is their duty, however, to "cast their care on God"—~~***

To cast their care upon any *creature*would be fruitless, and it would involve them in the deepest guilt, [Jeremiah 17:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.5). God alone is able to sustain their burden—on him they are commanded to cast it, [Psalm 55:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 55.22); they must do so in the exercise of faith and prayer, [Philippians 4:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.6-7); nor are any cares whatever to be excepted, "Cast *all*your cares," etc; no cares are so small but they shall be regarded by God, no cares are so great but they shall be alleviated by God.

There is a backwardness in many, to comply with this duty.

***~~II. Their encouragement to perform it—~~***

***~~God's care extends to the whole creation; but in a more especial manner cares for his redeemed people—~~***

He conducted the Jews through the wilderness.

He interposed for them in all their dangers.

He supplied their every need, [Psalm 105:39-41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 105.39-41).

Thus, though less visibly, he still regards those who trust in him:  
He watches over them for good, [2 Chronicles 16:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 16.9).  
He limits and restrains all their adversaries, [Psalm 76:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 76.10).  
He sympathizes with them in all their afflictions, [Isaiah 63:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 63.9). [Hebrews 4:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.15).  
He imparts to them all needful temporal and spiritual blessings, [Psalm 84:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 84.11).  
He hears and answers all their supplications, [John 15:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.7).  
He accounts them his most inestimable treasure, [Malachi 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.17).  
He communes with them as his sons and daughters, [2 Corinthians 6:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.18).  
He takes upon him the management of all their concerns, [Isaiah 46:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 46.4).

What encouragement does this afford us to trust in him!

Our Guardian and Protector is infinitely wise, [Isaiah 28:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 28.29).

He knows whatever we stand in need of.

He can suit all circumstances to our necessities.

He can overrule them for our eternal benefit.

He is possessed of almighty power, [Job 40:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 40.2).

There is no difficulty from which he cannot extricate us, [Isaiah 50:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 50.2); [Isaiah 43:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 43.13). Nor is there any duty which he cannot enable us to discharge. Should we, for whom such wisdom and power are exercised, be anxious? [Isaiah 40:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.27-28).

Moreover he is infinitely good and gracious.

What innumerable blessings has he already bestowed upon us! He has even given his own Son to die for us. What then can we have to fear, if we trust in him, [Romans 8:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.32).

Above all, he is a faithful God.

He has promised seasonable protection and strength, [Isaiah 54:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.10). [Deuteronomy 33:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 33.25). [1 Corinthians 10:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.13).

Is not his word a sure ground of confidence, [2 Samuel 22:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 22.31). [Hebrews 10:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.23).

Surely then we would be filled with consolation rather than with care [Hebrews 6:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.18).

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How needful is it that all should acquaint themselves with God!~~***

Gaiety and dissipation may bear up the spirit in prosperity; but God alone can comfort us in adversity, [Job 35:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 35.10). At the hour of death we shall all need Divine support.

Let the careless then begin to reflect upon their state.

Let them provide a refuge against the day of trouble.

Let them follow that beneficial advice, "Now acquaint yourself with Him, and be at peace; thereby good will come to you! [Job 22:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 22.21)."

***~~2. How happy would Christians be if they rightly enjoyed their privileges!~~***

It is their privilege to be "without worry, [1 Corinthians 7:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 7.32)." If they trusted in God as they ought, nothing could disturb them, [Isaiah 26:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.3). Hence that exhortation to rejoice in God, [Psalm 5:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 5.11-12).

Let the afflicted saints then commit themselves to him, [Micah 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 5.4).

Let them know that *duty*is theirs, but *outcomes*are God's.

Let them, in the face of all difficulties, adopt the words of Joshua, [Numbers 14:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 14.9).

Let them, with Hezekiah, repose themselves on God, 2 Chronicles 32:7-8.

***~~#2414~~***

***~~THE MEANS OF DEFEATING SATAN'S MALICE~~***

***~~[1 Peter 5:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.8-9)~~***

"Be self-controlled and vigilant. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings."

There are many who deny the influences of the Holy Spirit. No wonder therefore if the agency of Satan is called in question. But there is abundant proof in the Scriptures that Satan exercises a power over the minds of men. Peter had learned this truth by bitter experience.

In this view the caution he gives us is worthy of particular attention:

***~~I. The malice of Satan—~~***

Satan is the great adversary of mankind. It was he who caused the fall of our first parents, [Genesis 3:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.1-5). He has exerted a similar influence over all their descendants. He still maintains his enmity against the seed of the woman, [Genesis 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.15). He is justly compared to "a roaring lion."

***~~He is subtle—~~***

The lion prowls with subtlety in search of prey: this is noticed in David's description of wicked men, [Psalm 10:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 10.9-10). Satan also uses many devices to destroy souls, [Ephesians 6:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.11). He suits his temptations to us with astonishing craft: he draws us into his snare before we are aware of his wicked designs, [2 Corinthians 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.11). To be acquainted with his devices is a most eminent and useful part of Christian knowledge, [2 Corinthians 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.11).

***~~He is active—~~***

The lion ranges far and wide in search of his prey; and Satan "walks to and fro throughout the earth, [Job 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.7) and the text;" he ceases not from his exertions day or night, [Revelation 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 12.10). He is the more diligent as knowing that his time is limited, [Revelation 12:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 12.12). He has legions of evil emissaries acting in concert with him, [Mark 5:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 5.9). If at any time he suspend his attacks, it is but for a season, that he may return afterwards with greater advantage. Compare [Luke 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.13) with [Luke 22:53](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.53).

***~~He is cruel—~~***

The lion little regards the agonies which he occasions; nor has Satan any compassion for the souls which he destroys. The savage animal kills to satisfy the calls of nature; but our wicked adversary reaps no benefit from the destruction of men. His exertions serve only to increase his own guilt and misery; yet is he insatiable in his thirst for our condemnation. This is strongly intimated in the words, "Like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour!"

***~~He is powerful—~~***

Feeble is the resistance of a lamb against the voracious lion: still more impotent are men before "the God of this world." Satan, has a limited power over the elements themselves, [Job 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.12); [Job 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.19). He is called "the prince of the power of the air." The ungodly are altogether subjected to his will, [Ephesians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.2). [2 Timothy 2:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.26); nor would the saints have the smallest power to resist him, if God would deliver them into his hands. Many who have appeared lights in the Church have been swept away by the tail of this great dragon, [Revelation 12:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 12.3-4).

If we believe this representation of Satan's malice, we cannot but desire to know,

***~~II. The means of defeating his evil schemes—~~***

Our adversary, though great, is not invincible. There is one stronger than he, that can overcome him, [Luke 11:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.21-22); and God has prescribed means whereby we also may vanquish him:

***~~Moderation—~~***

An undue attachment to the things of time and sense gives him a great advantage over us. He will not fail to assault us on our weak side. It was he who instigated Judas to treachery, and Ananias to falsehood; but he wrought by means of their covetousness, [John 13:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.2). [Acts 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.3). A deadness to the world will in some measure disarm him. He prevailed not against our Lord, because he found no irregular affection in him, [John 14:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.30); nor could he so easily overcome us if we disregarded earthly things. A contempt of life has been a principal means whereby the saints and martyrs in all ages have triumphed over him, [Revelation 12:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 12.11).

***~~Vigilance—~~***

Unwatchfulness, even in a victorious army, exposes it to defeat: much more must it subject us to the power of our subtle enemy. Peter had experienced its baneful effects. He had been warned of Satan's intention to assault him, [Luke 22:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.31). He had been commanded to pray lest he would fall by the temptation, [Luke 22:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.40); but he slept when he would have been praying, [Luke 22:45-46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.45-46). He stands in this respect, like Lot's wife, [Luke 17:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 17.32), a monument to future generations; but vigilance on our part will counteract the designs of Satan. The armed Christian, watching unto prayer, must be victorious! [Ephesians 6:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.18).

***~~Fortitude—~~***

The timid Christian falls into a thousand snares, [Proverbs 29:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 29.25). The only way to obtain a victory is, to fight manfully; and this is the duty of every follower of Christ, [Ephesians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.10); [Ephesians 6:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.13). We must never give way to Satan, [Ephesians 4:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.27). We are called to wrestle and contend with him, [Ephesians 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.12); nor shall our resistance be in vain, [James 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.7). Satan is not only checked but terrified, and vanquished, by the resistance of the weakest Christian.

***~~Faith—~~***

Unbelief is a powerful instrument in the hands of Satan. He excites it in us that he may turn us from the faith: we must therefore hold fast the doctrines of faith. We should not suffer ourselves to be moved from the hope of the Gospel: this is our anchor whereby we must outride the storm, [Hebrews 6:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.19). We must also steadfastly exercise the grace of faith. This is the weapon whereby we overcome the world, [1 John 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.4); and by this shall we triumph over Satan himself, [Ephesians 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.16).

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

Let not the ungodly despise this adversary; but let them seek deliverance from him through the Gospel, [Acts 26:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.18).

Let the godly be continually on their guard against him, [2 Corinthians 11:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.3), so shall they experience that promised blessing, [Romans 16:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.20).

***~~#2415~~***

***~~GOD'S GOODNESS AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO PRAYER~~***

***~~[1 Peter 5:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.10-11)~~***

"And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power forever and ever. Amen."

Among the various testimonies of affection which faithful ministers will give to their people, that of praying for them is the most unequivocal, and most important. And in this the Apostles eminently distinguish themselves in all their epistles. In the petitions before us, we behold the glowing zeal of Peter, studious to exalt the honor of his God, and to promote to the utmost the welfare of the saints.

We shall make some observations on Peter's words, in the order in which they lie.

***~~The first thing that calls for our attention is, the honorable appellation he gives to God—~~***

God is the only fountain of all grace. There is no grace in the creature, which has not been derived from him, [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16). But in him is "all grace"—converting grace, comforting grace, sanctifying grace, establishing grace. He is "the God of" all grace: all kinds of it, and all degrees, are in him alone. *Whatever is the grace that we each need, we shall find an inexhaustible fullness of it treasured up in him*. And, if we ask of him in terms of the most extensive import, and then stretch our imaginations far beyond what it is in the power of language to express, it still will be true that "he gives *more*grace, [James 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.6);" and gives it freely too, according to his own sovereign will, [Matthew 20:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 20.15), 1 Corinthians 12:11, even to the very chief of sinners.

***~~Next we have an account of what God has done for his believing people—~~***

God has "called them," not merely by the *outward*ministry of his Gospel, (for that he has given to thousands who reject him,) but by the *inward operation of his grace*. Nor is it to any common mercy that he has called them, but to "his glory," yes, to the "eternal" enjoyment of it. What a stupendous act of grace! Yet this is greatly heightened by the means which he has used for the communication of this blessing. He has sent it by the ministry, (by the ministry, do I say?—hear, O heavens, and be astonished, O earth!) He imparts it through the mediation of "Christ Jesus," his only dear Son.

O that this glorious description of the Deity might always be remembered by us in our addresses at the throne of Grace!

***~~The petitions which the Apostle offered on behalf of the saints, were exactly such as their state required—~~***

They were now enduring "a great fight of afflictions," and, in order that they might persevere unto the end, it was necessary that they would be:  
"established" in the faith,  
"strengthened" in the profession,  
and "settled" in the enjoyment of the Gospel.

For these things therefore the Apostle prayed; knowing, by bitter experience, that they must come from God, the only Author of such inestimable blessings. For these things also should our prayers be offered: and the consideration of what God is in himself, and has done for us, may well encourage us to offer the most enlarged petitions. If we "open our mouth ever so wide, we need not doubt but that he will fill it, [Psalm 81:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.10)."

***~~His prayers, however, were qualified with a very necessary concession—~~***

God has not given us any reason to expect an exemption from suffering. On the contrary, he has told us plainly, that our road to Heaven lies through much tribulation, [Acts 14:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 14.22). Even "Christ himself was made perfect through sufferings;" and every man must be conformed to him in this respect. Sufferings are sent to *test*our grace, to *illustrate*our grace, and to *confirm*our grace; and finally, to work out for us a proportionable weight of glory. The Apostle therefore did not presume to interfere with the established order of things; but only to pray, that their trials might be as light and transient, as would consist with the accomplishment of their proper ends. In this respect he sets a good example for us; and teaches us to desire rather a sanctified use of our afflictions, than a premature removal of them.

***~~To these he added a doxology well suited to the occasion—~~***

Who can reflect on what God is in himself, or on what he has done for us, or on what he is ready to do for us—and not desire that his name may be glorified, and that every thought may be subjected to his holy will? When the Apostle says, "To him be glory and dominion forever and ever;" who is not ready to exclaim with ardent affection, "Amen, and amen!"

O brethren, let such views occupy our attention, and such prayers and praises be ever ascending from the altar of our hearts!

***~~This subject may be of use:~~***

***~~1. For reproof—~~***

How far are the generality of professing Christians from such exalted views of God, or such deep concern for the welfare of men's souls! If they think of God in the quality of a Governor and Judge, they are not conscious of any defect, though they scarcely ever raise their minds to him as their adorable Benefactor: and, if they occasionally promote the comfort of men's bodies, they seem to themselves excused for not attending to their souls.

But, beloved, let us not be contented to live in so low a region, or to exercise so little grace: but let our love to God and man bear some affinity and proportion to the love that God has shown to us.

***~~2. For encouragement—~~***

What is there that we may not expect at the hands of such a God? We may go to him for ourselves; we may go to him for others: we may ask of him all manner of grace: the weakest may obtain strength; and the most wavering may obtain establishment in the divine life. Let us know the privilege of sincere prayer. Let us, especially under our afflictions, betake ourselves to the throne of grace: and if, while we are praying to him, our trials increase, let us not be discouraged: only let us tarry his leisure; and our sorrows shall before long be turned to joy, and our prayers to praise, [Ephesians 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.20).

***~~2 PETER~~***

MMCCCCXVI

Peter's Salutation to the Saints

[2 Peter 1:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 1.1), [2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Peter 1.2). Simon Peter, a servant and an Apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ: grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord.

IN reading the epistles of the different Apostles, whether written to particular Churches, or to the whole catholic Church throughout the world, we cannot but be struck with the benevolence which they breathe in every part, and especially in the salutations with which they begin, and the blessings with which they close. In the words which we have now read, which, as in the former epistle, are addressed to the whole Church scattered through the Roman empire, we may notice two things,—an inscription—and a salutation: to both of which we will now turn your attention.

I. The inscription.

Here the Apostle describes,

1. The writer.

His own proper name was Simon, or Simeon, as he is called in the original and by the Apostle James. The name Peter was given to him by his Lord on two different occasions; partly, to mark his characteristic boldness; and partly to intimate, that on his testimony both to Jews and Gentiles the Christian Church should be established. The office he held as a servant and an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ was the highest that could be assigned to mortal man: and the peculiar care which he took in thus designating his own name and character satisfies our minds that this epistle, no less than the former which bears his name, was written by him: for no bad man would have written it; and no good man could have been guilty of such a forgery as that of assuming the name and office of this inspired Apostle.

2. The persons addressed.

These were believers throughout the world. They "had faith" in our Lord Jesus Christ, as the only Savior of fallen man. They had "obtained" this faith, not by any efforts of their own, but, as it were, by lot, just as all the tribes of Israel obtained their portion in the promised land. To each the precise measure was assigned by God himself: nor was there one throughout the whole land who was not constrained to acknowledge that he owed his portion solely to the free and sovereign grace of God—This faith was precisely "the same" whether in Apostles or private Christians, and "alike precious" to them all: for though the faith of different persons might differ widely in its degrees and consequent operations, it was "alike precious" to all, inasmuch as it was the one means of uniting them to Christ, and of saving their souls alive—"Through the righteousness of God our Savior" too was this faith obtained: for by that righteousness it was purchased for them; and through the prevalence of that righteousness, as pleaded with God in their behalf, was the gift of faith imparted to them.

In this respect, then, every saint under Heaven answers to the character drawn by the Apostle, and may consider the epistle as addressed personally to his own self in particular, as much as ever it was to the saints in the Apostle's days.

From the inscription we pass on to,

II. The salutation.

"Grace and peace" comprehended all the blessings of the Gospel.

Sometimes, in the salutations of the Apostles, "mercy" is added; "Grace, mercy, and peace," but generally it is, as here, "Grace and peace." By "Grace" I understand all that is necessary for the transformation of the soul into the Divine image: and by "peace," all that is necessary for the comfort and encouragement of the soul in its progress heavenward.

These the Apostle desired to be "multiplied" unto the saints.

There should be no measure of these in which we should rest; seeing that there is no measure which may not be greatly and abundantly increased. We should therefore, even if our attainments were equal to those of the Apostle Paul, "forget what is behind, and reach forth to that which is before."

They are to be multiplied solely "through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord ."

It is by that knowledge alone that grace and peace are at first obtained: when we look to God as reconciled to us in Christ Jesus, then grace and peace flow down into our souls. In like manner, it is only through an increasing acquaintance with this mystery that we grow up into Christ, and are transformed into his image. Contemplate then more and more the wonders of redeeming love: and be assured, that in proportion as you are enabled to comprehend them, you shall "be filled with all the fullness of God."

Address.

Receive this as a faithful expression of my regards for you: and pray for me, that what I desire in your behalf, I may richly experience in my own soul.

MMCCCCXVII

Everything Needful Provided for Us

[2 Peter 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 1.3). His divine power has given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness.

THE Lord Jesus Christ, as Mediator, procures for us all blessings from God: but, as God, he authoritatively imparts them. It is of him that the Apostle speaks, when he says, "His divine power has given us all things that pertain unto life and godliness." But the words which follow my text are of more doubtful interpretation. Some understand them as importing, that these things are given for the acknowledgment of God, who has called us by the mighty working of his power. This rendering of the words is so extremely different from that which our translators have given us, and at the same time is maintained by so many persons of eminence, that I have chosen rather to wave the consideration of them altogether, than to determine which of the two is the more correct: though I cannot but say, that I prefer the sense that is given us in our authorized translation. The words before us convey a most important truth, which I shall endeavor to illustrate. The Lord Jesus has indeed given us all things that pertain unto life and godliness,

I. In a way of general provision.

In his blessed word, he has given to us, and to the whole world,

1. Instructions.

There is nothing needful for us to know, but it may be found in the Scriptures of truth. There we are informed how a sinner may be reconciled to his offended God—There we see how we may obtain a new nature, and be renewed after the image of our God in righteousness and true holiness—There we are told how we may walk so as to please and honor God—Nothing is omitted there, which can conduce, either to our obtaining of life, or to our possessing of vital godliness. And whatever has been added by man, has a tendency rather to counteract than forward our eternal interests.

2. Promises.

These are "exceeding great and precious," and comprehend everything which our necessities require. Place us in any situation that can possibly be imagined, and there will be found a promise directly applicable to our state. Nor is anything required of us, in order to obtain an interest in these promises: if only we have a desire after the things promised, and a willingness to receive them as the free gift of God for Christ's sake, they become ours, and shall be fulfilled to us: and by them we shall be made partakers of that very godliness which might be supposed to be a necessary pre-requisite for an interest in them. We are not first to cleanse ourselves from sin, and then lay hold on the promises; but first to take the promises, and then, by their influence, to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness, both of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God."

3. Examples.

The force of example is pre-eminently great, as affording us both direction and encouragement. And there is no grace which we can be called to exercise, but we have it exhibited and embodied in some bright pattern that is set before us. As for faith, the first leading grace from which almost all others flow, the examples of it are innumerable; and the powers which it possesses to elevate the soul are displayed in the strongest colors. Would we wish to know the precise operations of patience and meekness? the lives of Job and of Moses afford us most distinguished patterns. Would we behold fidelity, devotion, and the constraining influence of love? Elijah, David, Paul, say to us, 'Be followers of us, and you shall attain these graces in perfection.' Such examples as these, not to mention any others of a different kind, which are "set forth for our admonition," serve to explain the precepts, and to show us what measure of godliness we should aspire after, and may hope to attain. So that nothing is wanting to us, that can by any means help us forward in the divine life.

But the Lord Jesus Christ has, to his obedient followers, given all things also,

II. In a way of special communication.

The instructions, promises, examples, which are contained in the Holy Scriptures, are common to all; but to his peculiar people the Lord Jesus Christ has given graces, which, by his divine power, he has wrought in their souls. On them he has bestowed,

1. The gift of faith.

This grace is essential to the welfare of every child of man; for it is through it alone that either life or godliness can be brought into the soul. But he enables his people to come to him, and lay hold on him, and to embrace his promises; and to draw forth out of his fullness all needful supplies, both of grace and peace. In their minds he works a conviction, that they have nothing in themselves to recommend them to God, and can do nothing whereby to obtain an interest in his favor. To them he makes himself known, as "the way, the truth, and the life;" and he brings them to "live altogether by faith in Him, who has loved them, and given himself for them."

2. The assistances of his grace.

"Without him they can do nothing," but "through strength communicated by him, they are enabled to do all things." Have they to conflict with Satan, and withstand his assaults? They go forth in the strength of Christ, and are made "more than conquerors," not all the powers of darkness can stand before them. Have they to sustain the heaviest afflictions? Through Christ they are enabled to "glory in tribulations;" and to "take pleasure in every species of distress for his sake," under a full assurance that "his strength shall be made perfect through their weakness;" and that "he shall be magnified in their body, whether by life or death." Whatever they have either to do or suffer, "his grace his sufficient for them;" and his divine power "makes them perfect in every good work to do his will, working in them that which is well pleasing in his sight."

3. The consolations of his Spirit.

These are of prime necessity in the divine life; for "the joy of the Lord is our strength." Without the light of God's countenance lifted up upon us, our "hands will hang down, our knees be feeble, and our hearts faint." But he will send to his people the Comforter, according to his word, to be in them "a Spirit of adoption," "a witness of their relation to him," and "an earnest of their eternal inheritance." This will support them under all their trials, and animate them in all their conflicts, and bear them up above all the concerns of time and sense. With "his love shed abroad in their hearts," nothing will move them: "nor will they count their lives dear unto them, if only they may but fulfill his will, and finish their course with joy."

Application.

1. Let us inquire whether these blessings have indeed been conferred on us.

As possessing the Book of Revelation, we have free access to all the benefits contained in it. But have we availed ourselves of this liberty, so as to have become partakers of the blessings themselves? How many are there who name the name of Christ, and yet have never received anything from him but the name! Look you well to this matter, my dear brethren; for, if you be not brought to live by him, and for him, and to him, it were better that you had never heard the Gospel at all; yes, and better that Christ himself had never come into the world.

2. Endeavor to make a just improvement of them.

If we are responsible to God for the offers of salvation, which are given to the whole world, much more are we for those special communications which are made only to God's peculiar people. Have you light in your understandings? follow it with holy assiduity, and with a tender conscience; never "hiding it under a bushel," or "shutting it up in unrighteousness." Have you good desires in your hearts? Labor to carry them into effect; and rest not until you have attained the object for which they were given. Let every grace "have its perfect work in you, that you may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

3. Impart liberally to others what the Lord Jesus has so liberally conferred on you.

It is not for yourselves only that Christ has bestowed on you such blessings; but that you may be instruments in his hands to impart them to others. Have you the Holy Scriptures? Put them, if possible, into the hands of every child of man. Are you instructed in the knowledge of them? Send out missionaries into the world, to instruct the heathen, and to bring your Jewish brethren to the knowledge of that Savior whom their fathers crucified. Endeavor, too, that the rising generation be imbued with the principles of our holy religion, and be made partakers of all the benefits which you yourselves enjoy—"Freely we have received; freely give," and let every blessing that you possess be regarded as a talent to be improved for the Lord, and to be accounted for to him at his judgment-seat.

MMCCCCXVIII

The Preciousness of the Promises

[2 Peter 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 1.4). Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

COMMENTATORS are not agreed with respect to the connection of these words. Some connect "whereby" with "glory and virtue," in the preceding verse; and understand it thus: "By which glorious energy of the Gospel are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises." Others, understanding the third verse parenthetically, connect my text with "God and Christ," in the second verse, and translate the passage thus: "By whom are given unto us," and so on. But, for the use which I am about to make of the passage, it is of no importance to determine precisely what the connection is. It is to the greatness and preciousness of the promises that I propose to direct your attention: and, therefore, waving any further notice of the context, I will open to you the promises of God, and show you,

I. Their intrinsic worth.

But how shall I attempt this? Shall I bring them all in order before your eyes? Many hours would not be sufficient for this arduous undertaking: let it suffice, then, to say,

They extend to all the necessities of sinful man.

Even the things of this life are frequently and fully comprehended in them: for Paul says, "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." And our blessed Lord has assured us, that, if we "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all needful things shall be added unto us." But "the things which pertain unto life and godliness" are those which are more immediately referred to in my text: and there is no want which an immortal soul can feel, in reference either to time or to eternity, which is not richly provided for in the promises of our God. Pardon, and peace, and holiness, and glory, are all secured to us, in terms the most explicit that language can afford. Nor, if men had been permitted to dictate unto God what things should be made over to them, or how freely they should be bestowed, could they ever have ventured to express what God has expressed, or to ask them on such easy terms: for all the promises are to be apprehended simply by faith, and to be possessed by all who will truly and sincerely rest upon them".

But fully to declare their worth is impossible.

Who shall appreciate a deliverance from the torments which are endured by those who are now cast into the lake of fire and brimstone? or, who shall form a correct estimate of the glory and felicity of Heaven? None but those who have experienced the one or the other can form any just conception of either: nor could any one fully and adequately comprehend what salvation imports, unless he have both endured the evil from which a condemned soul is rescued, and partaken of the blessedness to which a glorified soul is exalted before the throne of God. Eternity will be too short to count the inestimable worth of the exceeding great and precious promises which are contained in the Gospel of Christ.

Let us pass on to consider,

II. Their sanctifying efficacy.

We must not imagine that any sinner can so "partake of the Divine nature" as really to be united to the Divine essence. That is impossible. But to partake of all the communicable perfections of the Deity, is the privilege of all who believe in Christ.

We are exalted to bear a strict resemblance to the Deity.

In mind, in will, in our whole character, we may resemble God: for, in conversion, we "are renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created us;" so that we view everything no longer according to the apprehensions of our corrupt nature, but as taught of God, and enlightened by his Holy Spirit. With a renovated understanding we receive also a new heart; so that, instead of finding our will opposed to the will of God, "we delight in the law of God after our inward man," and desire to do his will even as it is done in Heaven. I say not too much, if I add, that the very character of God is imparted to his saints, even as the impression of a seal to the melted wax; so that, through the operation of his grace upon them, they become "holy, even as he is holy," and "perfect, even as their Father which is in Heaven is perfect." As for "the corruptions that are in the world through lust and inordinate desire, the true believer escapes from them," he renounces the world and all its vanities: he "becomes crucified to it by the cross of Christ," he rises above it, "keeps himself unspotted from it," and has his "conversation altogether in Heaven."

And by what is all this effected, but by the promises of God?

"By these we become partakers of the Divine nature, and escape the corruption that is in the world through lust." Paul is particularly careful in marking this important truth. He traces not any of these benefits to mere human efforts, but simply to faith in the Lord Jesus, which alone can "overcome the world," and "purify the heart." Hear his words; and mark especially the order which he prescribes for the attainment of these blessings: "Having these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." Here, at the same time that he specifies the extent to which the promises will effect this change, he shows us, that we are not to attain the change first, and then lay hold on the promises; but first to lay hold on the promises, and by them to attain the change. Now, this is a point of extreme importance; and it was marked with singular precision in the Jewish law. In the ordinance for the cleansing of the leper, it was appointed that the blood of his sacrifice should be put upon the tip of his right ear, and on the thumb of his right hand, and on the great toe of his right foot; which was to show, that, in all his faculties, whereby he either received or executed the will of God, even from head to foot, he needed an application of the blood of atonement, to cleanse him from his guilt: and then oil was not only to be applied by the priest to the same places, but to be "put upon the very place of the blood of the trespass-offering" And what was this intended to show? I hesitate not to say, it was intended to declare the very same thing which is intimated in my text; namely, that our justification by the blood of atonement must be first sought, and then our sanctification by the Holy Spirit; that the blood of atonement must be the foundation of our sanctification; and that, though the two are never to be separated, they must be sought in their due order, and be put each in its appointed and appropriate place. In a word, we must first go to God as sinners, to obtain mercy through the blood of Christ; and then shall we be made saints, by the operation of the Spirit of Christ upon our souls.

Inferences.

1. How desirable is an interest in Christ Jesus!

It is in Christ that all the promises are treasured up for us; and in Him alone are they ratified and confirmed to us. Unless as found in him, and united unto him by faith, we have no part in any one of them: but "all are ours, when we are Christ's." How earnest, then, should we be, in fleeing to him, that we may receive out of his fullness all the blessings both of grace and glory! I pray you, brethren, neglect him not; but seek him with your whole hearts, and cleave unto him with your whole souls.

2. How truly blessed are they who are united to him by faith!

To them God has secured everything, not by promise only, but by oath also! And this he has done in order that they might be assured of "the immutability of his counsel, and enjoy the richer consolation in their own souls." Take the word of God, my dear brethren: cull out of it every promise it contains, and carry it to the throne of grace, and plead it before God; and truly you shall, in your dying hour, be able to say with Solomon, "Blessed be the Lord, who has given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he promised: there has not failed one word of all his good promise which he promised by the hand of Moses," or by all his prophets from the foundation of the worlds.

MMCCCCXIX

The Christian's Graces

[2 Peter 1:5–9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 1.5â9). Beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that you shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he who lacks these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and has forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.

GREAT and unspeakable are the blessings given to us by the Gospel: for in it "God has given to us all things that pertain unto life and godliness;" and "through the exceeding great and precious promises contained in it, we are made partakers of a divine nature, and are enabled to escape the corruptions which are in the world through lust. Yet we are not to suppose that these blessings will flow down upon us without any effort on our part to obtain them. We must, if I may so speak, be "workers together with God," or as my text expresses it, must "give all diligence to add" one grace to another, in order to our growing up into a perfect man.

Were we to enter minutely into every part of this exhortation, we should only distract your minds by too great a diversity of matter. It will be more instructive and edifying to compress the subject, so as to preserve its unity, and to bring before you in one point of view what we conceive to be the mind of the Holy Spirit in this important passage. For this end we will commend to your attention,

I. The import of the exhortation.

Two things we see in it;

1. What are the graces which we are called to exercise.

It is here taken for granted that we have "faith;" for, in truth, we have no pretensions to call ourselves Christians until we have believed in Christ, and are united to him as branches of the living vine.

Assuming then that we are true believers, we must "add to our faith virtue." By virtue we are not to understand that general assemblage of graces which in modern language is associated with that term; but courage, which is absolutely necessary to the Christian's welfare. A man who will be faithful to his God, and walk worthy of his profession, will have much to contend with, both from without and from within: and, if he be not endued with fortitude, he will be in danger of yielding to discouragement, and turning back from his profession. Even the sneers of an ungodly world are not easy to bear: and thousands, through the fear of them, have made shipwreck of their faith. We must therefore be bold, if we would be "good soldiers of Jesus Christ."

"To our virtue we must add knowledge." By "knowledge" I understand, not general information, but wisdom and prudence, without which our courage may lead us astray, and prove injurious to the cause which we profess to serve. We must seek "a spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." Among the children of Issachar, we are told, "there were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to doc." Such should we be. The same conduct, if pursued at all times, and under all circumstances, would be very absurd: and perhaps scarcely in anything does the adult Christian differ from the child more than in the exercise of "sound wisdom and discretion," by which he is enabled to avoid the errors of the inexperienced, and to "walk wisely before God in a perfect way."

To this must "temperance be added." In this term also there is more implied than we generally annex to it. In this catalogue of graces it would appear a small thing to say, that we should abstain "from surfeiting and drunkenness;" (though that doubtless is necessary for Christians too.) We are, as has been before noted, in a state which calls for bold and judicious exertions: and as those who contended in the Grecian games were "temperate in all things," in order that their bodily strength and agility might qualify them for their contests, so are we to be temperate, in order to ensure success in our spiritual conflicts. We should sit loose to all the things of time and sense, as well to those which are lawful as those which are unlawful! "using everything so as not to abuse it," and "keeping under all our bodily appetites, and bringing them into subjection, lest, after all our profession, we become reprobates."

"Patience" is another grace which must be added to all the former. And this too, like all the former, must be understood in somewhat of a larger sense, not merely as a meek submission to trials, but as a persevering effort to fulfill all the will of God. We are told, that "we have need of patience, that, after we have done the will of God, we may obtain the promise," and it is only "by a patient continuance in well-doing, that we ever can obtain glory, and honor, and immortality." This grace then must be added to all the rest. We must never be weary, either in doing, or in suffering, the will of God: but, as the gardener waits for the precious fruit of the earth, and has long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain; so must we "be patient, and establish our hearts, until the Lord himself shall come," to crown, and to reward our labors.

We must not however rest here. "To patience we must add godliness," for without a pious regard to God, all our efforts will be in vain. We may conceive of all the foregoing graces as exercised by a heathen: but we must have that sublime piety which no heathen can possess. We must see the hand of God in everything; and receive everything as from him; and do every thing as for him; making his will the rule, and his glory the end, of all our actions. At the same time, we must walk with him, and delight ourselves in him, and maintain sweet fellowship with him as our Father and our Friend, and must look for his approbation as our great reward.

To this there is yet another grace which we must add, and that is "brotherly-kindness," We are all one family, and must regard every member of that family with a truly fraternal affection. It is "by this love one to another that all men are to know us for Christ's disciples;" and by it we ourselves also are to judge of our having "passed from death unto life."

That which closes the train, and which must of necessity be added to all the rest, is "charity." For though there is an especial regard due to "the household of faith," our love must not be confined to them: it must be extended to all, even to enemies; and must so pervade our whole spirit and temper, and so regulate all our words and actions, as to evince that we are indeed children of Him, whose name and nature is "Love."

2. The importance of them to the Christian character.

No words can declare the importance of these graces to the Christian more forcibly than those in which the Apostle has declared it in my text: for he asserts, that the constant exercise of them will prove us to be intelligent and consistent Christians, while the want of them will prove us ignorant and inconsistent.

Attend to these assertions. "If these things be in you, and abound, they make you (that is, they render, or constitute you) neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." How shall it be known that any man possesses a truly scriptural and saving knowledge of Christ? It cannot be determined by his professions, but by the whole of his spirit and deportment. As a tree is known by its fruits, so is the faithful follower of Christ. If indeed these graces could flow from any other source than an union with the Lord Jesus, they would determine nothing respecting the reality of our faith in him: but they cannot. A man may have valor, and knowledge, and temperance, and patience, without any acquaintance with the Lord Jesus: but the whole assemblage of graces that are here mentioned he cannot have: they can be wrought in the soul only by the Spirit of God: and the Spirit can be supplied by none but the Lord Jesus Christ, "in whom is the residue of the Spirits," and "in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily," and to none will Jesus so impart the Holy Spirit but to those who believe in him. Hence the existence and operation of these graces in the soul is a decisive evidence, that our faith in Christ is lively, our knowledge of him spiritual, and our walk before him consistent.

On the contrary, "he who lacks these things is blind, and cannot see afar off; and has forgotten that he was purged from his old sins." A speculative knowledge may be possessed to a great extent, without any practical effect: but the circumstance of its being inoperative, clearly shows, that the person possessing it has no spiritual discernment. He is blind, or at best very dim-sighted, as to the excellency of the principles which he maintains: he sees not their proper tendency: he is unconscious of the worthlessness of mere notions, however just they may be, if separated from their practical effects: he betrays an utter ignorance of the nature of true religion: and he shows, that he has forgotten all the professions which he made, and the vows that he took upon him, when first he was baptized into the name of Christ. When by baptism he entered into covenant with God, he professed, that, as he expected the remission of sins through the blood of Christ, so he expected the mortification of sin by the Spirit of Christ. He engaged, that from that hour he would seek a conformity to Christ, "dying unto sin, as Christ died for sin, and rising again unto righteousness, even as Christ rose again to a new and heavenly life." But by his want of all these graces, or his allowed deficiency in the exercise of them, be shows that he has forgotten all his former engagements, and is an ignorant and inconsistent professor, who disgraces that holy name by which he is called.

Now, I say, attend to these assertions of the Apostle, and judge whether the graces before-mentioned be not indispensably necessary to the Christian character, and whether we ought not to "give all diligence" to have the whole train of them exhibited in our lives.

In further considering the Apostle's exhortation, let us notice,

II. The insight which it gives us into pure and undefiled religion.

We should not be satisfied with viewing truth in abstract and detached parts: we should endeavor to acquire enlarged views of religion; to see it in all its bearings, and to get our minds duly impressed with its excellency and grandeur. In this we shall be greatly assisted by the Apostle's exhortation; which, while with prismatic accuracy it brings before us the separate rays of which religion is composed, presents in their united power the full radiance of the Christian system.

See then in this passage the excellency of true religion:

1. How comprehensive it is in its nature!

There is not any situation in which we can be placed, wherein religion does not prescribe the path that shall be pursued; nor any variety of circumstances that can occur, in which it does not meet with a corresponding variety of limitations and exceptions. There is not an operation of the human mind which it does not undertake to regulate, and require to be under its exclusive control. Perhaps we may fitly compare it with the office of the soul in our animal frame. Without the soul the body is dead. By its presence the human frame is animated throughout. The soul pervades, and operates in, every part. Not the smallest motion of the body is independent of it. Whatever faculties be called into exercise, they derive all their power and energy from it. It is altogether through its agency, that the eye sees, the ear hears, the hand moves. And these different powers are exercised with ease, because of the entire presence of the soul's energies in every part. Were there a single member, even the smallest in the human frame, that did not experience its power, it would be paralyzed, and the body, as a whole, would be deformed. Now thus it is that religion takes possession of the soul. Until that occupies the soul, the soul is dead: but when that descends into the soul, all our powers, whether of mind or body, are subjected to its control. The influence of it being universal, its actings are easy, and without effort. If indeed there be an occasion that requires more than ordinary exertion, a suitable energy is put forth, just as in the human frame, when necessity requires.

Now what a view is this of religion! How grand, how glorious does it appear! Yet is this the view of it as set before us in the text, where every habit and disposition of the human mind is regulated by its requirements, and called forth into exercise by its vital energies. Such was Paul's view of it when he said, "May the God of peace sanctify you wholly! And I pray God, your whole spirit and soul and body may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

2. How connected in its parts!

Which of the graces which the Apostle has enumerated in my text, can you dispense with? The whole forms a chain; of which, if one link be broken, the entire use is destroyed. Some indeed of these appear of less importance than others: but not only is every one of them necessary in its place, but every one must partake of the others that are connected with it, and can only operate with effect, when its exercise is so tempered. For instance; what would valor be without prudence? or prudence without temperance? or temperance without patience? or patience without godliness? or godliness without brotherly-kindness? or brotherly-kindness without charity? Take any one away, and the beauty and excellence of the whole will vanish altogether. Paul well illustrates this idea in his description of the Christian's armor. The sword, the shield, the helmet, the greaves, the breast-plate, and the belt, are all necessary in their place: the loss of any one would be severely felt by the Christian combatant, and occasion his ultimate failure in his warfare. We must have "the whole armor," or none. So the want of any one of the graces specified in our text would suffice to ruin the soul forever. Our Lord has told us this in the most express terms. He supposes that we may fall short only in someone particular point: and that for that failure we may have an excuse, which might appear sufficient to satisfy any candid mind. The particular evil which we know not how to part with may be dear to us as a right eye, or necessary to us as a right hand. Yet, if we submit not to pluck out the one, or amputate the other, our whole body shall be cast into Hell, "where the worm dies not, and the fire is not quenched." In this the beauty of religion, as the beauty of the human frame, consists: only with this difference; that the body, though defective in its parts, may live; but the soul, if any one grace be wanting, is dead.

I pray you, brethren, consider this; and let the truth of it receive a daily illustration from your conduct. Never place religion in any one duty, or in any one set of duties; but let all the graces of the Spirit have their appropriate place, their seasonable attention, and their harmonious exercise.

3. How lovely in its influence.

Only conceive of any person living in the constant exercise of all these graces: how amiable, how godlike, I had almost said, would be his deportment! Then conceive of a whole family penetrated with this spirit, and what a picture of Heaven would you behold! But conceive of religion filling, as assuredly it will one day fill, the whole earth, and every individual of mankind living in the unvaried exercise of these heavenly dispositions: well may such a state as this be called, as it is frequently in Scripture called, "The reign of Christ on earth." Blessed, blessed state! O that God would hasten it m his time! But if we be not privileged to behold that day, let us at least seek the commencement of that period in our own souls Let us seek to resemble Christ as much as possible, and to "have the beauty of the Lord our God" beaming from our own face. This Moses had, by communing with God upon the holy mount; and this we also may have, if we will "give all diligence" to attain it. Rise then to the occasion: let your efforts be without intermission: cry mightily unto God for grace and strength: plead with him the promises which he has made to you in his Gospel; and "which in Christ Jesus are all yes, and amen." So shall you be enabled to "cleanse yourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God."

MMCCCCXX

Making Our Calling and Election Sure

[2 Peter 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 1.10), [11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Peter 1.11). Brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if you do these things, you shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

IN the system of religion which the inspired penmen have transmitted to us, duty and privilege go hand in hand. It is "the Divine power alone which gives us all things which pertain unto life and godliness," but we must exert ourselves in dependence on that power, to "escape the corruption that is in the world through lust." This plain and scriptural idea gives the true solution to many difficulties that occur in the sacred volume, and particularly so to those which arise from the words before us.

In the text are set before us,

I. Our duty.

Though all are agreed that our duty is here declared, the opinions of men differ widely respecting the precise nature of that duty. Our first point therefore is to fix the true meaning of the text.

By our "calling and election," is meant that effectual call which men receive when they are truly converted unto God, and which both evinces, and results from, God's eternal purpose to save their souls.

Now those who deny the doctrine of election, argue thus. We are commanded to "make our election sure;" and, if we neglect to do so, we may "fall" and perish forever: therefore there is no such thing as is generally understood by "election;" and that which is so called in Scripture, is nothing more than a designation of God to the enjoyment of outward privileges, or an acceptance of us upon certain conditions.

To avoid these consequences, many who hold the doctrine of election affirm, that the exhortation in the text means only that we should exert ourselves to get an assured sense of our election.

But there is no such ambiguity in the original, as there is in our translation. Whatever the text may prove or disprove, it can have but one meaning; namely, that we are to make our election firm, and, by diligence in good works, to secure the benefits to which God has elected us.

This however does not disprove the doctrine of election. The truth is, that God elects us to holiness as the means, as well as to glory as the end: He elects us to the end by the means; so that the end can never be secured but by the means prescribed. Though therefore God does elect us unto salvation, we can never partake of that salvation, if we be not found in a diligent discharge of all our duties, and the constant exercise of all moral virtues. Hence Paul, notwithstanding he was assured of his final enjoyment of Heaven, was careful to "keep his body under and bring it into subjection, lest, after having preached to others, he himself should be a cast-away;" and hence we also are commanded to "look to ourselves, lest we lose the things we have already wrought, and so come short of our full reward." The truth lies, not in a simple affirming or denying of the doctrine of election, but in connecting the means with the end, as the joint objects which God, in his eternal purpose, has determined to accomplish.

The meaning of the text being ascertained, the duty contained in it is clear.

There is a connection between all the graces of the Spirit: they are so many links in a chain, no one of which can be dispensed with. If we have faith, we must add to it "valor," that shall encounter difficulties; "knowledge," that shall regulate the whole of our deportment; "temperance," that shall make us indifferent to the pleasures of sense; "patience," that shall carry us through all hardships; "godliness," that shall fill us with a delight in heavenly things; "brotherly-kindness," that shall knit us to every member of Christ's mystical body; and "charity," that shall engage us in all offices of love even to our very enemies. All of these graces we should cultivate; and, having attained any measure of them, we should seek to grow in them daily; resting in no attainment "until we come to the measure of the full stature of Christ."

In laboring after these things, we shall "make our calling and election sure," we shall not only prove that we have been elected of God, and called by his grace, but shall "strengthen the things that remain," and "make firm" the work that has been begun in our souls. Indeed the very pursuit of virtue must in itself tend (in proportion as we are diligent) to keep us from declension: and it is certain, that God will prosper those who conscientiously labor to approve themselves to him.

Here then is our duty, namely, to secure by unwearied diligence in good works the final enjoyment of those blessings to which God has elected us by his grace, and called us by his good Spirit. And, to aid us in the discharge of this duty, the Apostle sets promises before us for,

II. Our encouragement.

"Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." But more particularly God engages to give his diligent and devoted people,

1. A steadfast life: "If you do these things, you shall never fall."

It too often happens that professors of religion are left to dishonor their holy calling by open and scandalous offences: nor have any of us any security against such falls, except as we are upheld in God's everlasting arms. But this security shall be afforded to the zealous and faithful follower of Christ. My text says, "If you do these things, you shall never fall." The diligent Christian doubtless will, even to his dying hour, have reason to acknowledge, that he is a poor imperfect creature: but he shall be kept from flagrant transgressions; and shall, in respect of them, "be preserved blameless unto God's heavenly kingdom." Numberless are the promises of God to this effect—And O, what encouragement do they afford to those who know their weakness and their frailty! Surely the hope of being enabled to "do all things through the strength of Christ," and of being made "more than conquerors through him that loved us, and of having "our strength in all respects proportioned to our day of trial," may well stimulate us to exertion, and make us diligent in performing everything which God requires at our hands.

2. A triumphant death.

A variety of things may occur to affect the mind of a dying saint, and to prevent him from displaying the full efficacy of his principles in his last hours: but, in the general, the peacefulness of his departure will be proportioned to the integrity and diligence of his life. Indeed, it may be expected by those who "abound in every good word and work," that God will be peculiarly present with them in the time of their greatest need: they may hope to be favored with Pisgah-views of the heavenly Canaan, and, like Stephen, to behold their Savior standing ready to receive them. Such was Paul's departure, after a life of unremitting exertion in his Master's cause: and such "an abundant entrance into the kingdom of our Lord shall be ministered to us" also, if we follow the steps of that distinguished Apostle.

Who that has ever seen the insensibility of some, or the terrors of others, would not wish to have this promise fulfilled to him in a dying hour?—Let us then live the life of the righteous, if we would die his death. Let us look to it, that we be daily ripening for glory: then shall we in due time be carried to it, "like a shock of corn" to the garner.

Application.

You will naturally ask me, what directions I would give you for the attainment of this great object? I answer,

1. Let there be in you no allowed sin.

The wisdom that is from above, is "without partiality and without hypocrisy." One leak will sink a ship; and one allowed sin will destroy the soul. If ever you would be saved at last, you must be "Israelites indeed, and without deceit." Faith in Christ must be laid as the foundation; but every Christian grace must compose the edifice that is built upon it.

2. Cry mightily to God to perfect and complete his work within you.

He who has been "the Author of your faith must also be the Finisher." "Be strong only in the Lord, and in the power of his might." Commit your soul into the Savior's hands, and entreat him to "keep you from falling," so shall you "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God," and "be kept by the power of God through faith unto everlasting salvation"

MMCCCCXXI

A Pastoral Admonition

[2 Peter 1:12–15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 1.12â15). Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you, always in remembrance of these things, though you know them, and be established in the present truth. Yes, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ has showed me. Moreover I will endeavor that you may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance.

IN every period of the world, the servants of God, at the close of life, have labored with more than ordinary assiduity to impress on the minds of their people the truths, which, from the commencement of their ministry, they have inculcated. When Moses had brought the Israelites to the very borders of Canaan, he was ordered to "write a song, and to teach it to the children of Israel, that to the latest period of time it might be a witness against them for the Lord," in the event of their turning from him to serve other gods. Joshua, in like manner, at the close of his life, called for all Israel, and charged them to "fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and truth;" and, on their engaging so to do, he said, "You are witnesses against yourselves, that you have chosen you the Lord to serve him." Paul also, how affectionately did he warn the elders of Ephesus, who had come to take their leave of him at Miletus! Thus does the Apostle Peter, in this his second epistle to the Jewish converts dispersed throughout the world, endeavor to "stir them up," by calling to their remembrance the truths he had inculcated, that so they might, after his removal from them, retain their steadfastness even to the end.

In conformity with these examples, I would, after ministering to you for half a century, point out,

First, what, in conformity with Peter's example, I have, from the beginning, labored to instill into your minds.

I might here, in the review of my whole ministerial life, adopt the words which Paul used at the close of his career: "Having obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come; that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people (the Jewish people) and to the Gentiles." Yes, I can appeal to all who have ever known me, that to proclaim a suffering and triumphant Messiah, as revealed to us by Moses and the prophets, has been the one object of my life, without any variation as arising from the persons addressed, "whether small or great," and without ever turning aside after novelties, or fond conceits, or matters of doubtful disputation. From the beginning, "I determined," like that blessed Apostle, "to know nothing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

But I will draw your attention rather to Peter's conduct, and to his expressions as contained in the foregoing context. He says, "I will endeavor that you may be able, after my decease, to have these things always in remembrance."

What "these things" were which he here refers to, I will endeavor to explain. He addresses himself to those who had obtained like precious faith with him, through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ," and he calls upon them to "add to their faith, virtue," and a whole series of other graces suited to the Christian character. These were the things which their profession of Christianity indispensably required, and which alone could justify any pretensions to the knowledge of Christ, or give them a hope of acceptance in the eternal world.

Now, my brethren, these are the things which I also, according to the grace given to me, have inculcated, from the first moment that I came among you. And these are the things which I am anxious that "you should bear always in remembrance after my decease." I am aware that you, my stated hearers, both "know these things, and are, for the most part, established in the truths that have been set before you." But I know also what danger there is of your forgetting them, when he, who has so long declared them unto you, is removed to a better world. You cannot but recollect, that the whole people of Israel, within the short space of forty days after that Moses had absented himself from them, turned away from Jehovah to worship the golden calf: and that "King Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, no longer than while he was under the eye, and the instruction, of Jehoiada the priest." What then can I expect, but that many of you will "let slip the things which you have heard," and "turn aside from the holy commandments delivered to you?" Excuse me, therefore, if I lay hold on this present opportunity to bring to your remembrance what you have so often heard delivered to you with all plainness and fidelity.

If it be asked why Peter adopted this course towards his Jewish converts, and why I endeavor to follow his example, I will proceed to show you,

Secondly, Why he was, as I myself also am, anxious that you should "have these things always in remembrance."

Among the numberless reasons that might be assigned, I shall content myself with stating the three following:.

First, I would impress these things on your minds, because on your remembrance of them depends the everlasting welfare of your souls.

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the foundation of all your hopes. You all know that you are sinners, and that, as sinners, you are under a sentence of condemnation. And how shall that sentence be reversed? Need you be told, that you can never, by any works of your own, purchase the remission of your sins? You know you cannot. You know, that even your best actions are very imperfect, and incapable of claiming for you any recompense, if tried by the test of God's holy law: so that for them, no less than for any fouler transgressions, you need forgiveness at the hands of God. Hence, I trust, you are ready to say with Paul, "I desire to be found in Christ, not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is of the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith."

At the same time, you know the necessity of universal holiness in order to prove and attest the sincerity of your faith. I bless God, there is not among you all, so far as I know, even one single individual, that leans to Antinomian licentiousness, or that has any conceit that his faith can avail for his salvation, unless it "work by love," and "purify the heart."

Yes, I am happy to say, that "you know these things, and are, for the most part, established in them." But is there no danger of your declining from them, when the tongue that now inculcates them shall be silent in the grave? Even in the midst of all endeavors to keep you in the "good old way," have you never seen any "turned from the simplicity that is in Christ?" Alas! alas! even in the apostolic Churches such declensions were common: we must not wonder, therefore, if, among ourselves, some be drawn aside by Satan, to "make shipwreck of their faith, and of a good conscience." But what must be the result of such instability? The Apostle tells us, that "if any man draw back, my soul," says God, "shall have no pleasure in him." Yes, beyond a possibility of doubt, every such person, whoever he be, and whatever he may imagine, "draws back unto perdition;" and his last end is worse than his beginning."

And shall it be thus with any of you, my brethren? God forbid. I tremble at the thought of it, and will endeavor, as far as in me lies, to prevent so awful an issue to my present ministrations. Let me tell you again and again, (for "to speak the same things to you, to me is not grievous, but for you it is safe;") let me tell you, I say, that "there is no other foundation for any sinner in the universe to build upon, but that which God himself has laid in Zion, which is Jesus Christy." And let me further declare, that "it is not a dead faith that shall save you, but one which is productive of good works;" and that "without holiness, real, universal holiness, no man shall see the Lord."

Next, the Apostle labored to impress these things on their minds, because he knew that his opportunities for reminding them of them were coming to an end.

The Lord Jesus Christ had told him many years before, that, when he should be old, he should be bound, and crucified by his enemies. And the time for this catastrophe was now near at hand: yet with such sweet composure did the Apostle contemplate this tremendous death, that he spoke of it only as the taking down of a tent or tabernacle, to rear it again in a better place: but, as it would put a termination to his earthly career, he was anxious to improve his few remaining hours in fixing these things upon their minds, in order "that they might have them in remembrance after his decease." And though I have no reason to expect such an end, yet it cannot now be long before I must be called to "put off this my tabernacle," and to cease from the work in which I have been engaged these fifty years. I do indeed bless God, that I have one to succeed me in part who shall carry on the work to far greater advantage than I have ever been able to do: but yet, who shall occupy the more ostensible post of your stated minister, God alone knows; and whether he shall maintain among you the same doctrine of justification by faith, and hold up before you the same high standard of practical piety, none but God can tell: but this I know, that no doctrine but that of a crucified Savior, can ever avail for your salvation; and that no measure of holiness, less than that of an entire devotedness of heart and life to God, can ever justify a hope of an interest in Christ. And, whether all this be inculcated on you or not, who can tell whether you shall retain the experience of it in your souls? I look at the Seven Churches of Asia, and see how they were fallen, even while the Apostle John yet remained to instruct and warn them. And in what state are they now? Or see, if you will, places in our own land, where once a faithful ministry was established, and to what a state are they now reduced! Richard Sibbes and John Preston once ministered in this place; but how little of their mind and spirit was transmitted to later generations, the records of this parish even in my own time, most fully testify. While then God is pleased to continue me among you, "I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though you know them, and be established in the present truth." As long as I am able to bear any testimony among you, I will still declare, that Jesus, our adorable Lord, is the only Savior of sinners; and that as his atoning blood alone can ever cleanse you from the guilt of sin, so his blessed Spirit alone can ever renovate you after the Divine image, or make you "meet for the inheritance of the saints in light." Receive you this, my brethren, as by anticipation, my dying testimony. Treasure it up in your minds, that, "after my decease, you may have it always in remembrance." It is a comfort to me to think, that "long after I am dead," I shall, by my printed works, "yet speak to you;" and, though I cannot hope that they should occupy the attention of persons situated as you are, they will exist as records of the doctrines delivered to you, and among them, this, as my dying address, will find a place, as a memorial of my love to you, and of my desire for your eternal welfare.

One more reason for Peter's so insisting upon these things was, that he could not otherwise discharge his duty towards those whom he had been commissioned to instruct. He says, "I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance." His expression here is remarkable: The word "meet," would be properly translated "just," He thought it just to do this: he considered, that, to be remiss in the discharge of this duty, would be an act of injustice; an injustice to them; an injustice to God; an injustice to himself. In this light I also consider it, my beloved brethren. If I should not press upon your minds the knowledge of Christ, and the necessity of universal holiness, it would be an act of injustice to you. You have been committed to me by Almighty God, as sheep to a shepherd, that I might watch over you, and lead you into the pastures which God has provided for you; and rather lay down my life for you, than suffer you to fall a prey to that "roaring lion that seeks to devour you." It would also be an act of injustice towards God, who is the great Proprietor of the fold, and who will "require at my hands the blood of every one among you that has perished through my neglect." Alas! What account shall I give to him when he shall summon me to his tribunal, and inquire into my discharge of my pastoral office? 'Did I not send you to watch over them? Did I not appoint you a "steward of those great mysteries" which I had revealed in my word, the mysteries of redeeming love? Did you not undertake to make known to them all that my dear Son had done and suffered for them? Did you not engage to declare all that my Holy Spirit was empowered to work within them, by transforming them into my perfect image? Why then did you accept the office of an ambassador from me, if you did not intend to discharge it with fidelity? Why did you suffer so much as one single "soul for whom Christ died, to perish" through your neglect? Was it for this that I entrusted you with so high a commission, and put my interests into your hands, that you should be so remiss in the discharge of the one, and so careless in the advancement of the other?' I may add also, it would be an act of injustice to myself. I know that "your blood will be required at my hands," and I engaged at my ordination to "watch over you as one that must give account" to the Judge of quick and dead. How then shall I appear at the judgment-seat of Christ, if I neglect to "declare unto you the whole counsel of God?" What shall I say when that question shall be put to me, "Where are those sheep which I committed to you in the wilderness?" My dear brethren, if I have no concern but about my own soul, I must fulfill the ministry committed to me, and labor, while yet any remnant of power is continued to me, to stir up in your minds a love to that Savior who has died for you, and to bring you to that conformity to his image, which can alone fit you for the enjoyment of his presence and glory.

But now, in the third place, what shall I say in order to effect my purpose? What considerations shall I urge upon you in order the more effectually to impress your minds with the truths which I have before stated? I will adopt the line of argument suggested by the Apostle himself in the preceding context.

An adherence to these things is what you engaged for in your baptismal covenant. Then Christ was received by you as your Lord and Savior: and you professed to look for remission of sins altogether in his name, and through faith in his blood and righteousness. At the same time you gave up yourselves to him to be sanctified in body, soul, and spirit by his grace, and to live altogether to his glory. But, if you recede in any respect from these engagements, you abandon all the hopes which were then held out to you by that covenant of being "purged from your sins," and you forfeit that remission, which, if you received your baptism aright, or subsequently realized the engagements then entered into, was then conceded to you. And are you willing to cast off thus your Christian profession, and to sacrifice your interest in those "great and precious promises" which were then offered to you in the Savior's name, and "by which you might have been made partakers of the Divine naturel," and heirs of the Divine glory? Think, I pray you, of the loss you will sustain, and the tremendous responsibility that will attach to you: and beg of God, that he will never leave you thus, nor suffer you to "receive all this grace in vain."

Further let me say, These are the things on which your perseverance in the divine life entirely depends. A simple life of faith on the Lord Jesus Christ is to you what the union of a branch is to its parent stock. If from adopting any notions whatever your communion with him is interrupted, nothing but decay and death can ensue. So likewise, if there be any one grace which you do not cultivate, the neglect of that will open the door to numberless other evils, and you will be "left to fall" and perish. It matters not what that virtue is which you neglect: if "intemperance," or "impatience," or "uncharitableness," or "ungodliness" of any kind be suffered to retain an ascendant over you, it will, as water in a leaky ship, in a little time fully occupy your soul, and finally sink you to perdition. "A right hand or a right eye," however necessary it may appear to your present happiness, will, if retained, "destroy both body and soul in Hell." The union of faith and holiness must be complete and abiding, even as the root of the tree with the fruit: both, in their place, are necessary to "make your calling and election sure," and, if either fail, you will inevitably and eternally perish.

Once more—It is by bearing these things in remembrance that you will ensure to yourselves a happy dismissal from the body at the hour of death, and an abundant entrance into the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." As to anything of exalted joy in the hour of death, I do not see much of that in the death of the Scripture-saints, nor do I think that, as a general occurrence, we are authorized to expect it. But peace in a dying hour we may expect: "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace." But how is this to be secured? It is by cleaving to the Lord Jesus Christ with full purpose of heart, and by endeavoring to glorify him by a holy life and conversation. An entire reliance on him is necessary. Nothing but a view of his all-atoning sacrifice can satisfy the mind in a dying hour. We may now run after notions that are mooted and propagated in the Christian world: but they will afford us little comfort when we are about to enter into the presence of our Judge, and to receive at his hands our eternal doom. Nothing, I say, but a view of Christ as the appointed Savior of the world, will give us boldness at that day. But, if now we "live entirely by faith on him, as having loved us and given himself for us," we shall be able then to commit our souls into his hands with an assured hope of acceptance, and a blessed prospect of dwelling with him forever. At the same time, however, we must have the testimony of our conscience, that, amidst all our infirmities, we did not retain any allowed iniquity, but did endeavor to walk "as he walked," and to "purify ourselves even as he was pure." If in relation to this matter "our heart condemn us not, then shall we have confidence toward God."

Now consider, my dear brethren, how desirable this blessing is. To have misgiving fears in the hour of death will be very terrible: but to possess a sweet assured confidence that we are accepted of our God, and to have "an abundant entrance into the kingdom of our Lord and Savior," like that of a ship, with wind and tide in its favor, into its destined port, what felicity will that be! And how greatly is it to be desired! Would you then possess this blessing, keep in remembrance the things which I have preached to you; and get your minds so fully and continually occupied with them, that, after my decease, as well as during my few remaining hours, they may have their full influence upon you; and that, when we shall meet around the throne of God, I may have you as "my joy and crown of rejoicing to all eternity."

MMCCCCXXII

The Truth and Certainty of The Gospel

[2 Peter 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 1.16). We have not followed cunningly-devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

AMONG the various proofs which we have of the truth and certainty of our holy religion, one of great importance is, that among all the authors and founders of it no diversity of sentiment obtained upon any essential point of doctrine; whether the teachers of it were learned (like the Evangelist Luke and the Apostle Paul), or unlearned (like the rest of the Apostles), they were all of one mind: nor during the whole apostolic age was there so much as one controversy among them, if we except the doubt that was raised about imposing the yoke of the Mosaic law upon the Gentiles: nor was this question moved by the teachers themselves, but only referred to them by some who were less instructed among their converts. This shows, that they were all taught by one and the same Spirit: for it is not to be conceived, that among so great a variety of persons, so differently situated, and so differently gifted, there should not have been a considerable diversity of sentiment, sufficient to distract the minds of their hearers, and to cause divisions in the Church. Moreover, we never find one of the inspired Apostles speaking with doubt upon any fundamental point: they knew infallibly, and declared without hesitation, that we are all guilty and helpless in ourselves, all redeemed by the blood of Christ, all renewed by the influences of the Holy Spirit, and all to be summoned to the judgment-seat of Christ, to receive according to what we have done in the body, whether it be good or evil. We cannot but be struck with the confidence with which the Apostle Peter speaks in the words before us, and with the simplicity with which that confidence is expressed.

That I may place his words in a just point of view, I will endeavor to show,

I. What he had declared respecting Christ.

The generality of commentators confine "the power and coming" of the Lord Jesus Christ to his future advent to judge the world. But I see no reason for so limiting them: I see nothing in the context that should lead us to such a contracted view of them. I conceive that they include what Christ has done, as well as what he will do; and that the Apostle refers to,

1. The power with which Christ has come.

Both the epistles of Peter are catholic, addressed to the whole Church. In the former especially he speaks very fully, and forcibly, of the Lord Jesus Christ, and of the different ends and purposes of his advent. He declares him to have been "fore-ordained before the foundation of the world, but manifest in these last times for his people." He specifies the end of his manifestation, which was, to "redeem his people by his blood," and to bear their sins in his own body on the cruel tree. He declares him to have been "raised up from the dead by the Father; that our faith and hope might be in God," and he states, that by his "resurrection from the dead he has begotten us again to a lively hope of an incorruptible, and undefiled, and never-fading inheritance." He represents him further as "the foundation-stone upon which all his Church and people are built," and which will infallibly support them all forever and ever. And, lastly, he speaks of him as gone into Heaven as our forerunner, and as "reigning there above all the principalities and powers" of Heaven, earth, and Hell.

In the epistle that is before us too, he had spoken fully to the same effect, declaring that "grace and peace were to be multiplied unto us through the knowledge of this Savior," who is the one source and fountain of all good, and has "by his divine power given us all things that pertain unto life and godliness."

Now these things Peter had declared: and they are no other than what every minister of Christ must declare. His ordination to his office from all eternity, his execution of it in time for the salvation of a ruined world, his exaltation to glory, from whence he communicates all blessings to his people, and overrules everything for their eternal good, this must be made known by every minister of Christ, and must be received by every child of man.

2. The power with which he will come.

At a future period, that same Jesus, who was crucified, shall appear again "in power and great glory," and will come to "judge both the quick and dead." Then shall "his glory be fully revealed;" and his kingdom be established forever in the Heaven of heavens.

These things also the Apostle affirmed. And what less could be declared by any one that has undertaken to preach the Gospel?

If they appear to any to be a cunningly-devised fable, I ask, Why do they appear so? The only answer that can be given is this; That these things are too great to be comprehended by us, and too good to be expected or believed. They are great, no doubt; and they are good also, beyond all that any finite intelligence could have conceived. But they are not on that account to be questioned. The creation of the world out of nothing, as far exceeds our conceptions as the redemption of it. Both the one and the other are the offspring of infinite wisdom, and power, and goodness: and, if we were not compelled by the evidence of our senses to acknowledge the wonders of creation, we should be as ready to deny the possibility of them, as we are to question the wonders of redemption. But the Apostle declares, that even these latter had, as far as they could be, been made objects of sense; and every evidence of them that could be submitted to the senses had been given to him.

In confirmation of this the Apostle proceeds to state,

II. On what assured grounds he was enabled to bear

his testimony respecting him.

The Apostle had all the evidence respecting the Messiahship of Jesus that was possessed by the Church at large. He had beheld all the miracles that Jesus wrought, and heard all his discourses, and seen his bright example, and witnessed his resurrection and ascension, and had received from him the Holy Spirit according to his promise on the day of Pentecost; and had beheld also the triumphs of the Gospel over all the power and policy of earth and Hell. (Of the prophecies which he had seen fulfilled in him, we shall have occasion to speak hereafter.) But in addition to all these, he himself possessed an evidence which had made the deepest impression on his own mind, an evidence, which no other human being, except James and John, was ever permitted to behold, and which he could not forbear to adduce on this occasion in confirmation of all that he had stated.

He had received the evidence of his senses respecting the power and coming of the Lord Jesus.

He with James and John had been taken up to Mount Tabor by his Divine Master, who had there been transfigured before them. On that occasion the bright effulgence of the Deity had been made to shine forth in the person of the Lord Jesus, whose "face was as bright as the meridian sun, and whose clothing was as white as the light," whiter far than any fuller on earth could make them." This bright effulgence Peter had seen with his bodily eyes.

On that occasion too Moses had been raised from the dead, and Elijah brought down from Heaven, to bear their testimony to him. These two persons represented the law and the prophets, both of which had their full accomplishment in him: and they now, as it were, surrendered up their respective offices to him, who was henceforth to be the great Prophet, Priest, and King of his Church and people. Of this also Peter had been "an eye witness."

But, in addition to this, God the Father had borne witness to his Son by an audible voice from Heaven, saying, "This is that my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased: Hear you him." In these words there was a direct reference to what God had before said to Moses, "A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren like unto you: him shall you hear: and whoever will not hear that prophet, I will require it of him." This voice declared, that very Jesus was the prophet so referred to, and the prophet whom all must obey at the peril of their souls. And this voice Peter distinctly heard.

This evidence fully confirmed all that he had asserted respecting Christ.

He had declared that Jesus Christ was the only-begotten Son of God, "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person," and of this, as far as it was possible, he had been an eye, and ear witness. He had declared the sufficiency of his death for the redemption of the whole world: and how could he doubt this when God had audibly proclaimed his acquiescence in it in that view? He had declared, that the salvation or condemnation of every living man would depend on his acceptance or rejection of this Savior, who was the one Prophet, whom all must hear; the one Priest, in whom all must trust: and the one King, whom all must obey: and so strongly were these truths assured to him by all that he had seen and heard, that he could not doubt of them one moment, or hesitate to appeal to them, in proof that "he had not followed any cunningly-devised fable," as ignorant Gentiles, or superstitious Jews, were accustomed to do. And to these things do we also make our appeal: for in these things the three Apostles could not be deceived: and their whole life and death showed clearly enough, that they had no design or wish to deceive.

Application.

1. Let not any of you then be moved by the impious and blasphemous attempts which are made to undermine the Gospel.

You may see in my text the construction which infidels and blasphemers are accustomed to put upon the truths of revelation: they pour contempt upon them as "cunningly-devised fables," invented and propagated by designing priests for the advancement of their own interests. But who could ever disprove the truth and authority either of the Old or New Testament? It is easy enough to sneer and cavil at anything: and impious scoffers ever have treated in this way the truths of revelation, even from the days of Jannes and Jambres, who withstood Moses, to the present hour." "Men of corrupt minds, and reprobate concerning the truth," ever have, and ever will, "sport in this manner with their own deceivings." But, beloved, search the Scriptures for yourselves: examine the evidences which have been adduced in proof of their divine authority: see the suitableness of the provision which has been made for you by Almighty God in the person and work of his only-begotten Son: and you will soon see, that the great mystery of redemption carries its own evidence along with it, and that what is spoken in Scripture respecting it, is "a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance."

2. Let all of you get an experimental acquaintance with the Gospel in your own souls.

Peter believed the evidences which he had in common with others: but he felt peculiar conviction from those which he derived from his own personal experience. So the people of Samaria, who had believed on Jesus on account of the woman's testimony, told her afterwards, "Now we believe, not because of your saying; for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world." Thus do you seek, if not the evidences of your senses, yet the evidence of your own experience; for it is certain, that "he who truly believes in Christ, has the witness in himself," he knows the power and grace of Christ in a way that he never could know it from mere argument: and in speaking of Christ he can say, "What my eyes have seen, my ears have heard, my hands have handled of the word of life, that I declare unto you." There are "spiritual senses which may be exercised;" and though their testimony is not satisfactory to others, it is peculiarly convincing to those who possess it. For the good of others then I say, Seek an acquaintance with the established evidences of the Gospel: but for your own good I say, Go up to Jesus upon the holy mount, and there hear and see what God will reveal for the conviction and consolation of your souls. So shall you have an evidence which nothing can shake, and feel yourselves standing on a rock, which defies the assaults both of earth and Hell.

MMCCCCXXIII

The Testimony of Prophecy

[2 Peter 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 1.19). We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto you do well that you take heed, as unto a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts.

THAT persons ignorant of the grounds on which Christianity is established should doubt the truth of it, ought not to occasion us any surprise: for it must be confessed, that on a superficial view of the leading points contained in it, it does appear to surpass the bounds of credibility. That the God of Heaven and earth should assume our nature, and be made in the likeness of sinful flesh; that he should thus humble himself, in order that he might in his own person bear, and expiate, the sins of his rebellious creatures; that, having wrought out in our nature a perfect righteousness, he should offer that righteousness to all who will believe in him, and accept it in their behalf for the justification of their souls before him; there is in all this something so wonderful, so glorious, so delightful, that it does indeed appear like "a cunningly-devised fable;" and one is tempted to say concerning it, as Job did under a similar impression of the manifold grace of God, "If I had called to God, and he had answered me (and told me by an audible voice from Heaven that Christianity was true), yet would I not believe that he hearkened to my voice." As Peter, when actually liberated from prison, "knew not that it was true, but thought he saw a vision," so, when we have the actual experience of the Gospel salvation in our own souls, it actually seems at times to be "a dream." But it is no dream, no cunningly-devised fable; but a glorious reality. Of this the Apostle was well assured. He had received the most positive evidence of it from his own senses. He had seen his Lord transfigured upon the holy mount: and had heard the testimony which the Father had borne to him by an audible voice from Heaven; "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased." But, however satisfactory this evidence was to him, it could not be so convincing to others, because it depended solely on the testimony of himself and the other two Apostles who were admitted to that sight, and because the inferences which he drew from what he had seen and heard would not commend themselves with the same force to others as they did to him. But there were other grounds on which all might feel the same assurance as he himself did. There was "a more sure word of prophecy," which every one might examine for himself, and of which every one who did examine it was competent to judge. This no man could weigh without being convinced by it: he might as well doubt his own existence, as doubt the truth of Christianity, if only he examined the prophecies with a candid mind.

It is my intention to show you,

I. The evidence of our religion as founded on prophecy.

Truly it is "a sure word," that may well be depended on. Consider the vast collective body of prophecies: consider,

1. Their fullness.

There is not any one point relating to Christianity that has not been the subject of prophecy. Everything relating to Christ, his person, his work, his offices; his life, his death, his resurrection and ascension; his investiture with all power at the right hand of God; the nature, extent, and duration of his kingdom; and his second coming to judge the world; all has been fully and distinctly declared by holy men of God, who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. Now I ask, Would any one have ventured to predict so many things respecting an impostor? Supposing that the dangerous ground of prophecy had been taken by any who conspired to deceive the world, would they not for their own sake have been satisfied with a few general predictions, that were capable of different interpretations, and that were likely in the common course of events to happen? Would any persons have undertaken to give beforehand so full, so large, so complicated a disclosure of all that should come to pass? But add to this,

2. Their minuteness.

It is surprising that prophecy should condescend to such minute occurrences as were actually foretold concerning Christ. Not only were the time and place of his nativity foretold, but his expulsion from thence to Egypt, and his subsequent abode at Nazareth. So again, not only was the manner of his death declared, but such minute circumstances as could not be conceived; such as the very words which his enemies should taunt him with, while yet he should hang upon the cross; and their offering him vinegar to drink; and even the manner in which they should dispose of his clothing, casting lots for one part, while they divided the rest. Now I ask, Could any but the omniscient God predict such things as these? things, which could not be fulfilled by any except by the very enemies who put him to death as an impostor?

But the evidence, as arising from the fullness and minuteness of the prophecies, will derive great strength from marking,

3. Their consistency.

Certainly, when we consider that the prophecies were delivered by different persons wholly unconnected with each other, at distant times and places, during the space of three thousand six hundred years, and that the things which they predicted were in appearance so opposite to each other; it is inconceivable, that no inconsistency should be found in any of them, if they were not inspired by the omniscient and unchangeable God.

Let us enter a little into this point.—The person of the Messiah. He must be "Jehovah's fellow," "the mighty God," and yet "a man," yes "a worm, and no man, the very scorn of men and the outcast of the people." He must be "the Root and yet the Offspring of David," "David's Son, and yet David's Lord." He must be "a Lion," and yet "a Lamb." He must be a King, a Priest, and a Prophet, all in one. He must die, yet live. Though a Jew, he must die a Roman death, and yet not experience the same treatment as was shown to those who were crucified with him, in having his bones broken: yes, he shall "be pierced in his hands and feet," where the bones are so numerous, and by the soldier's spear also, and yet "not have a bone broken." He shall die as a malefactor, and yet "have his grave with the rich." He shall surfer thus under the hand of his enemies, and yet triumph; yes, and triumph by dying, and pass through the grave to his throne of glory; and, after standing at the tribunal of his rebellious creatures, summon the universe to his tribunal, and fix the everlasting doom of men and angels. Say, whether such apparent inconsistencies would ever have been predicted respecting an impostor, or, if predicted, would have been ever realized and fulfilled? There are, it is true, many prophecies which are not yet fulfilled. The restoration of the Jews, the conversion of the Gentiles, the universal establishment of Christ's kingdom upon earth; these things have not yet taken place: nor have the prophecies taught us to expect that they should yet be accomplished. But the fulfillment of such diversified predictions which we have already seen, leaves us no doubt respecting the accomplishment of the remainder in due season: and this is one reason why the evidence from prophecy is so convincing; that it is ever growing stronger and stronger by the augmented and ever-increasing force which it receives, from the events which are yet daily taking place in the Church and in the world.

This then may suffice for the first point which we were to consider, namely, the evidence of our religion as founded on prophecy. We now proceed to show,

II. The use which we should make of that evidence.

"We should take heed to it," and consider it well;

1. To satisfy our minds respecting the Messiahship of Jesus.

In the world at large we have nothing to guide us in relation to this point: and even from Judaism we gain but little light. The whole Mosaic dispensation was dark and shadowy: and the very predictions which were handed down to us by successive prophets were so dark, that they were not understood by the very persons who uttered them. But these prophecies serve us for a light, which, duly improved, will infallibly lead us to the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. We may illustrate this by the star which appeared to the Magi in the East, which first of all directed them to Judea, then to Jerusalem, the capital of Judea. There they made inquiries respecting "the person who was born King of the Jews." There, they learned that Bethlehem was to be the place of the Messiah's nativity: and Herod was the person who directed them to go to Bethlehem. But, when they were going thither, the star which they had before seen in the East went before them, and stood over the very house in which the infant was. So will prophecy guide us. At first we are informed, that "the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head," but where or when to find him we know not. Next we find, that he shall be of the seed of Abraham; and in the particular line of Isaac, and of Jacob. Proceeding further, we are directed to the family of David; and are told that he shall come while the second temple is yet standing, and be born at Bethlehem. Then we come to all the minute particulars respecting him. He must have such a forerunner as Elijah: he must have the Holy Spirit descend upon him: he must work unnumbered miracles in confirmation of his word: he must be scourged, and yet crucified; (though his scourging was inflicted by Pilate in order to prevent his crucifixion). A thousand minute circumstances must attend his death: and on the third day he must rise again; and ascend to Heaven, and send down the Holy Spirit upon his Disciples, and enable them to speak all manner of languages, and work all manner of miracles: and, by their instrumentality, he must so establish his kingdom in the world, that the gates of Hell shall never prevail against it. Now, where shall I find the person in whom all these, and ten thousand other predictions, meet? I go to one and to another; but I am stopped in a moment: I do not find in them any two requisites. I then come to Jesus; and I find he answers the description in some particulars. I then follow him to see if other things concur to point him out: and the more minutely I examine, the more evidence I gain, without one single disappointment. As the lot for the discovery of Achan fell first on the tribe, then on the family, then on the household, and then on the individual; so does every prophecy lead me nearer and nearer unto Jesus. until they fix infallibly on him as the object of my pursuit Thus, I say, I take prophecy for my light; and I follow it, until it stands over the very person of my adorable Lord, and leaves me no possibility of doubt respecting his being the true Messiah, the Savior of the world.

2. To lead us to an experimental sense of his excellency and glory.

We must not be satisfied with knowing that Jesus is the Messiah, but must seek to experience all the blessings of his salvation in our souls. Suppose a condemned criminal to receive a pardon from his prince, and at the same time a grant of large estates, and a title to all the highest honors of his kingdom; and the man were to satisfy himself with examining and ascertaining that the writing which conveyed to him these benefits, was not a forgery: what should we say of that man? Should we think him sane? Should we not expect that, as a rational being, he would leave his prison, and go forth to possess his estates and honors? Yet this is the very folly which we are guilty of. We are contented with ascertaining to our satisfaction the Messiahship of Jesus, and go not forth to him to obtain the blessings he has purchased for us. But let us remember, that a lamp is only to guide us through a dark place: when the day has dawned and the sun is risen, we are then to walk in the light of that sun, which will supersede the use of the glimmering taper we have just employed. Now thus it is that the Lord Jesus Christ, "the true Morning-star," "the Sun of Righteousness," will arise in our hearts, and "will manifest himself to us, as he does not unto the world." And, as light is its own evidence, so will he bring his own evidence along with him, and prove himself to be the Messiah by the blessings he imparts. Only let that "God, who commanded light to shine out of darkness, shine into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," and we shall have the same evidence of his Messiahship as a man has of the sun's existence when he is basking in the beams of its meridian splendor. This then is what we must seek. We must seek to have "the day dawn, and the day-star arise in our hearts," and then we shall be able to say to prophecy, as the Samaritans did to the woman who had guided them to Jesus, "Now we believe, not because of your saying; for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world." It is said of Heaven, that "the glory of God does lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof," and thus may it be said of us when Christ has once revealed himself within us; so bright, so cheering, so glorious will be his presence in the soul!

We may learn then from hence,

1. The propriety of considering the evidences of our religion.

Were we habituated from our early youth to consider these things, how vain and impotent would be the efforts of infidels to shake our faith! If we regarded nothing but intellectual amusement, we can scarcely conceive a richer feast to the mind than the study of prophecy. But, when we reflect that on the truth of Christianity our eternal welfare depends, it is surprising that we are not more interested about this all-important subject. We should not be satisfied with believing Christianity, because our fathers have believed it: we should examine for ourselves. We should search the Old Testament Scriptures, which testify of Christ; and compare them with the New Testament, in which the fulfillment of the prophecies is recorded. Thus should we examine the foundation upon which we propose to build, and assure ourselves that it will bear the edifice which we design to construct upon it.

2. The folly of resting in them.

A man who lays a foundation proceeds to build upon it. And so must we do. We have ascertained beyond a doubt that Jesus is the Christ. But what does the assurance of that fact avail us, if we go not to him for the salvation which he has purchased for us? The Israelites, when they found the manna that was round about their tents, inquired, "What is it?" But when they had ascertained that it was a species of bread given them from Heaven, were they satisfied with having learned that fact? No, they proceeded to gather it, each one for himself, and then to feed upon it from day to day. Do you then so in reference to Christ, who is "the true bread from Heaven." Do not imagine, that because you know he has been given, and are acquainted also with the ends and purposes for which he has been given, you will receive any benefit from that. You must lay hold upon him, and feed upon him from day to day. If he be indeed, as he has declared, the light of the world, you must walk in his light. Then shall your path to Heaven be clear, and your way delightful: and then shall you be prepared to dwell with him in that place, where "the sun shall be no more your light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto you, but where the Lord shall be unto you an everlasting light, and your God your glory."

MMCCCCXXIV

God the Punisher of Sin

[2 Peter 2:4–9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 2.4â9). If God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to Hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; and spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an example unto those that after should live ungodly; and delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;) the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished.

THERE were in the Apostles' days a set of religious professors, such as, I would fondly hope, scarcely exist at this time. If we take the chapter before us, and the Epistle of Jude, and mark the characters which are there portrayed, we shall not know where to look for persons of a similar description: or, if we find a few, they are so few and so insignificant, that they have no influence whatever in the Church. If they were at all numerous, we should not wonder that "the way of truth should be evil spoken of." But what has been, may be: and, if we be not alive to the dangers of an Antinomian spirit, we may yet see "false teachers among us, privily bringing in their damnable heresies, and denying the Lord that bought them, and bringing both on themselves and their followers a swift destruction." One of the most fearful and disgusting traits of such characters is, the boldness and confidence with which they propagate their errors; professing to expect for themselves, and promising to others, impunity in "their pernicious ways." But, whatever they may dream of in relation to their security, "their judgment now of a long time lingers not, and their damnation slumbers not." In confirmation of this truth, the Apostle adduces many striking examples, which attest, that God will put a difference between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve him, and those who serve him not.

The truths deduced from these records will form the ground-work of our present discourse:

I. God knows how to punish impenitent transgressors.

He has inflicted terrible judgments on account of sin.

Angels in Heaven have experienced his wrath. Respecting the fall of the angels we know but little. But this we know: there were a countless multitude of angels, once as holy and as happy as any that are now around the throne of God; but, on some temptation, they fell, and "left their first estate" of holy obedience, and for their wickedness were cast down from Heaven, into a place of inconceivable horror and misery created on purpose for their reception, where they are "reserved in chains of darkness unto the judgment of the great day." Their sin will in that day be made known before the whole assembly of men and angels, and the justice of God in their punishment be universally acknowledged. Their misery is not yet complete. God has seen fit to give them somewhat of a respite, as it were, until the counsels of God respecting the redemption of the world shall be completely fulfilled: but then, together with the ungodly from among our fallen race, they shall receive their final doom. They are indeed yet continually adding to their former impiety, by laboring with all their might to frustrate the counsels of Heaven in the salvation of mankind: and thus are they treasuring up continually an augmented weight of wrath, which at the appointed season shall come upon them to the uttermost.

On men too, even on the whole world, has God inflicted vengeance on account of sin. Scarcely had the world existed fifteen hundred years, before wickedness abounded in it to such a degree, that "God repented that he had made man." On this account, he determined to destroy the world: and for that purpose he sent a deluge, which soon covered the face of the whole world, and overwhelmed every living thing, with the exception of those which, with Noah and his family, were assembled in the ark.

Another instance of God's displeasure against sin has been manifested in the destruction of Sodom and the cities of the plain. Grievous beyond measure, and beyond sufferance, was the iniquity of those cities. Yet, if only ten righteous persons had been found in them, God would have spared the whole for their sake. But their being one only, he rained down fire and brimstone upon them from Heaven, and reduced them all to ashes, making them a terrible example to the whole world, of the vengeance that should overtake all who should thereafter live ungodly.

From these instances it is undeniably clear, that he both can, and will, inflict judgments on sin and sinners.

Here are facts; facts, which cannot be denied; facts, which bear upon them the stamp and character of divine agency; facts, which speak so loudly, that we cannot shut our ears against them.

There are doubts on the minds of men: 'Can God, or will he, execute his threatenings, when, if he should proceed according to his word, so many will be destroyed? Shall the great and noble be of no more account in his eyes than the meanest of mankind? or, if some notice shall be taken of sin, shall it be so severe as we are taught to expect?' Look, brethren, into the divine records, and all these doubts shall vanish in an instant. Angels confessedly are a far more exalted race of beings than men: yet not even angels were spared, when once they had sinned against their God; but were cast headlong from Heaven into the bottomless abyss of Hell. But will God proceed against so many? Look to the old world, where not a human being, except Noah and his family, was saved. But shall it indeed be so terrible? Look at the cities of the plain, and see what terrible destruction was brought on them: and bear in mind, that these very judgments were intended "for an example unto them that should thereafter live ungodly." Look, I say, at these things; and then doubt whether that judgment which is threatened shall be executed; "God will rain down upon the wicked snares, fire and brimstone, storm and tempest; this shall be their portion to drink." If, after seeing such proofs of the Divine veracity, we will not believe, we shall be constrained to believe when our own bitter experience shall leave no room for a possibility of doubt. The judgments may be delayed, even as the deluge was: but at the appointed season the vengeance shall come, and shall not tarry.

But from the aforementioned dispensations we are taught, that,

II. He knows also how to deliver and to save his tempted people.

Wonderfully did God interpose in behalf of Noah and of Lot.

Noah was a righteous man, and "a preacher of righteousness" to others. For the space of one hundred and twenty years he ceased not to warn and to exhort the world around him: but in all that time we read not of one whom he was the means of converting unto God. He however maintained his steadfastness amidst all the aboundings of iniquity: and God instructed him how to build an ark, for the saving of himself and his household. Of his family there were seven given to him; and he was "the eighth;" not the eighth lineal descendant from Adam; (for he was the tenth;) but one of eight, or the eighth of those who were saved in the ark. Besides him and those embarked in the same vessel with him, not a creature upon earth was saved: but he was brought forth to the new world in perfect safety.

Nor was the deliverance of Lot less wonderful. He also was "a righteous man," and his piety was made evident, by the deep interest which he took in the welfare of his fellow-citizens, and by the grief with which the iniquities of all around him oppressed his soul. And, until this righteous man was placed beyond the reach of harm, God himself could not proceed to execute his threatened vengeance. Two angels were sent from Heaven to bring him forth, and by a holy violence, as it were, to urge him forward, that he might not be overwhelmed by the impending storm.

And is he less concerned about his people now?

Your temptations and trials may be such as no human wisdom could foresee or avoid. But such were the calamities from which Lot and Noah were delivered. You may be a poor despised creature, derided as an enthusiast by all around you, and accounted either conceited or mad, on account of your hope and confidence in God: but such was the light in which those holy men were viewed by their contemporaries; yet they were dear to God, and were saved by him with a great and glorious salvation: and so shall you be saved also from your trials, whether they regard your temporal or your eternal welfare: nor shall so much as one thing occur, which shall not be ultimately over-ruled for your good.

Express you then your faith in God as they did.

Fear to offend him. No doubt those holy men were sorely tempted at times to yield to the solicitations, and to comply with the practices of those around them. But they maintained their integrity, and walked before God in all good conscience in the midst of all the abominations that surrounded them. So then do you: let your one concern be to serve and please him. Never forget that God is a holy God, and that he will punish iniquity: and "though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished." Walk uprightly before him; and none can hurt you: but give way to sin; and none can deliver you.

Learn also to trust him. Neither Noah nor Lot had any human help. They trusted in God: and he was all-sufficient for them. Confide you then in God, as they did. Bear in mind, that he is Almighty to effect whatever will conduce to your welfare; and that he is faithful to all his promises; not one jot or tittle of which shall ever fail.

Finally, dare to serve him. "Fear you not the reproach of man, neither be afraid of his revilings: for the moth shall eat him up." What if, through the aboundings of iniquity you be as singular as Noah was in the old world, or Lot in Sodom? it is not your fault, but the fault of those who will not serve God. Let the world deride your fears: they will before long see who was right; they who mocked at the impending judgments, or you who sought to escape them. Let them deride your hopes: the time is quickly coming, when they will wish that they also had entered into the ark, or fled to the mountain appointed for their abode. Be content to be derided now; in certain expectation, that God will before long "appear to their shame, but to your unspeakable and everlasting joy." While they are laughing at you, or sleeping in their sins, "their judgment lingers not, and their damnation slumbers not." And, while you are faithfully adhering to the service of your God, "the mansions in Heaven are preparing for you; and your Lord will quickly come to take you to the possession of them."

MMCCCCXXV

Apostates in A Worse State Than Ever

[2 Peter 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 2.20), [21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Peter 2.21). If after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.

THAT persons inspired with the love of God should endeavor to bring their fellow-creatures to the knowledge of him, and to a participation of the blessings which they themselves enjoy, seems easy to be accounted for; because nothing but good can result from their labors: but that men should be active in proselyting to impiety those who are walking uprightly before God, appears almost incredible; because no good whatever can issue from their exertions. Were we to see a bond-slave laboring with anxiety to reduce to the same situation with himself those who were enjoying the sweets of liberty; we should account it strange. Yet is the zeal of many exercised for this very end, while they strive to reduce to the bondage of corruption their brethren, who through grace have been delivered from it. In the Apostles' days, some professed to have been favored with sublimer views of the Christian system than others; and to have juster notions respecting the nature and extent of Christian liberty: and by "speaking great swelling words of vanity, they allured, through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, many who had clean escaped from those who lived in error," thus, under the semblance of ministers of righteousness, promoting most effectually the interests of Satan's kingdom. And such "false Apostles" will be found in every age, "deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the Apostles of Christ," and ruining the souls whose welfare they profess to seek. That this is the sad effect of their labors, the Apostle does not scruple to affirm: he even declares, that the persons so deceived by them are brought into a worse condition than they were in previous to their first acquaintance with the Gospel salvation.

In this statement of the Apostle we have,

I. A case supposed.

The case which he supposes is simply this; That a man may have attained the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, so as to see that salvation is by him alone, even by his blood which he shed for our fallen race, and his righteousness which he wrought out for their acceptance with God. Further, he supposes that a man may have experienced a considerable efficacy from this knowledge, so as to have been sanctified, in some degree, by means of it, and delivered from the pollutions of a sinful world. Thus he may practically and experimentally "have known the way of righteousness, and yet be again so entangled with the world as to be overcome by it;" and be so overcome by it as "to turn away finally and forever from the holy commandment delivered unto him."

Now this case may well be supposed.

Consider how extremely weak our nature is; how incapable we are of doing anything that is good, or of resisting anything that is evil, any farther than as we are strengthened by the grace of God. As it is of God alone in the first instance that we are enabled "either to will or to do" what is right; so is it by the continued operation of his grace alone that we can hold on in the right way: "without Christ" continually assisting us, "we can do nothing."

Consider also to what innumerable temptations we are exposed. There is not anything, however innocent in itself, which may not prove to us an occasion of sin. Our food, our clothing, our connections in life, may all be inordinately loved, or in some way be employed to ensnare our souls. Wherever we go, and whatever we do, we are exposed to temptations of different kinds; nor can any man living tell what a single hour may bring forth, or what a change may, through the influence of some unforeseen temptation, be speedily wrought in his moral or religious character.

Consider farther, what both Scripture and experience teach us on this very subject. Do not the Scriptures tell us, that many had already "made shipwreck both of faith and a good conscience," and that in the latter times such defections would be very numerous? Paul's expostulation with some of the Galatian Church deserves particular notice in this point of view: "Now, after that you have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn you again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto you desire again to be in bondage? I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed on you labor in vain." Why are we so often and so urgently cautioned against "being moved away from the hope of the Gospel," and "falling from our own steadfastness," if no such instance could occur? Is the case of Demas no warning to us? And have we not ourselves either known, or heard of, many, who, like him, "after running well for a season, have been hindered," and, like Lot's wife, become monuments and warnings to all around them? Are the stony-ground hearers, and the thorny-ground so rare in the Church, that there is no foundation for the supposition in our text?

To attempt to invalidate the supposition by an appeal to human systems, is highly inexpedient.

We never can sufficiently deplore the use which is made of human systems. Men will attach themselves to some fallible creature like themselves, and so adopt his sentiments, as to reject even the Scripture itself, when its declarations militate against their favorite opinions. There are in the Church of God not a few, who would shut their ears against a faithful exposition of our text, as much as they would against blasphemy itself; because they cannot reconcile the leading sentiment contained in it with the dogmas of their party. But who are we that we are to sit in judgment upon the sacred records, and to wrest from its obvious meaning every sentence which does not accord with our views? That there is no real contradiction between the supposition in our text, and many declarations in Scripture which have an opposite aspect, we could easily show, if it would not draw us too far from our subject: but suffice it to say, that many assertions, which are erroneously thought opposite to each other, have in reality a subserviency the one to the other, and, like wheels moving in an opposite direction, concur to the production of one common end. I therefore entreat you, brethren, not to attempt to weaken the force of the supposition in my text, by an appeal to human systems; but to admit it as a beneficial caution to yourselves, and to improve it with all diligence, that you yourselves may not become examples of the case that is supposed.

Admitting then the possibility of the case supposed, let me draw your attention to,

II. The evil of it declared.

Wherever such a case occurs, the man is indeed in a most pitiable condition: "His last end is worse than his beginning." Yes truly, he is in a worse state than ever,

1. In respect of guilt.

The more light a man has in his mind, the more he sins if he resist that light. Now in the case under our consideration, the person is supposed to have obtained "a knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and such a measure of it as has been attended with the happiest effects; and yet, after knowing the way of righteousness, to depart from it." Here then he must sin against light and knowledge: he must violate the dictates of his own conscience: for, though it is true enough, that a man may persuade himself that he is acting right, while yet he is violating the plainest commands of God, he cannot experience a transition from the service of God to the service of Satan without many rebukes from conscience, and strong misgivings in his mind. And every step he takes in such a state exceedingly augments and aggravates his guilt: insomuch that the sins which he committed in his days of ignorance, have no guilt in comparison of that which he now contracts. What our blessed Lord said to the Jews of old is strictly applicable to him: "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin." If to this be added, that in departing from the ways of righteousness he in a tenfold degree dishonors God, and brings disgrace upon his Gospel, and weakens the hands of the godly, and hardens the hearts of the ungodly, the sin of an apostate is great indeed.

2. In respect of bondage.

The Spirit of God strives more or less with every living man: but with those who have experienced the sanctifying effects of the knowledge of Christ, he must of necessity have wrought in a more abundant measure. Consequently, by the increased resistance necessary to overcome his sacred motions, he must have been the more deeply "grieved." And when once "the Spirit is quenched," and caused "to depart," and is so "vexed" as to become an "enemy" to the backslidden soul, What can be expected but that Satan should re-occupy the post from which he had been driven, and bind in stronger chains than ever his unhappy captive? This our blessed Lord has taught us to expect. He says, that Satan, under such circumstances, "will bring with him seven other spirits more wicked, if possible, than himself; and they will enter into the backslider's heart, and dwell there: and that the last state of that man will be worse than the first." The heart of the apostate must of necessity become more hardened in proportion as he has "rebelled against the light," and provoked God to give him up to his own heart's lusts. Hence the apostle speaks of it as "impossible to renew such an one to repentance." By this I understand not that it is absolutely impossible, but so difficult as to be beyond all reasonable expectation.

3. In respect of condemnation.

If guilt be increased, an increase of punishment must follow of course. "The servant that knows his lord's will and does it not, will be beaten with many stripes;" while he who sins through ignorance will be beaten with comparatively "few stripes." Hence our Lord declared to the cities of Bethsaida and Capernaum, that it should be "more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for them," for though their wickedness was not of the precise nature with that which so abounded in Sodom, yet it was committed in the midst of advantages which Sodom and Gomorrah never enjoyed. The same may be said of the apostate: "If we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour us." And this judgment will be proportioned to the guilt which we have contracted by our abuse of our pre-eminent advantages: for (it is added), "He who despised Moses' law died without mercy, under two or three witnesses. Of how much sorer punishment, suppose you, shall he be thought worthy, who has trodden under foot the Son of God, and has counted the blood of the covenant, with which he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and has done despite unto the Spirit of Grace?"

From all these considerations it is clear, that the last state of the apostate is worse than his beginning: and that it would have "been better for him never to have known the way of righteousness, than, after he has known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto him."

Application.

There are, it is to be feared, many here present, who have never yet been delivered from the pollutions of the world.

In truth, of this description are the great mass of nominal Christians throughout the world. If you take men's victory over the world as a criterion whereby to judge of their piety, you will find among the professors of Christianity quite as little as among Jews, or Muhammadans, or Pagans. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, that is, pleasure, and riches, and honor, are the great objects of ambition in every place: and, if a man be dead to them, he is "a sign and a wonder" to all around him. Look, beloved brethren, and see how your hearts stand affected to these things. Can you truly say, as before God, that "you have overcome the world," and that it is, as it were, under your feet? Have you ever had such views of "the cross of Christ, as have rendered the world and all its vanities like a crucified object in your eyes; and that you also are become like one crucified unto it?" I entreat you to attend to what the Apostle speaks in my text: "If after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." He here takes for granted, that this effect will follow, universally, and invariably, follow; all who know our adorable Savior will escape the pollutions of the world. I pray you to mark this: the Apostle takes it for granted: and he was right; for there never was, nor ever will be, one exception to this truth: all who know Christ aright, will become dead to the world, and escape from its pollutions. Bring yourselves then to this test: try yourselves, you whose friends and companions are worldly, whose desires and pursuits are worldly, whose joys and sorrows are worldly. If you were Christians indeed, you would "not be of the world, even as Christ was not of the world." You cannot be of the world, and of God too; for they stand in direct opposition to each other. "You cannot serve God and Mammon." Know then, that while you love and "mind earthly things," you have never yet "known the way of righteousness," and that though your state may be "worse," it is exceeding bad: for, if "the last end of the apostate is worse than his beginning," his beginning must of necessity be bad: and such is the state of all who have not yet devoted themselves to the service of their God.

But some there are, we may hope, who have, through the knowledge of Christ, been delivered from the world.

It is well you have thus far answered one end for which our blessed Savior died: for "he gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world." But you will do well to bear in mind the caution in our text. A change of situation often brings with it a change of conduct. Perhaps you may be somewhat advanced in rank or station, or may form some new connection, or be brought into some new circumstances: and you may easily persuade yourself that this change not only sanctions, but requires, a change in your habits and deportment. But "beware lest, as Satan beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so you also should be turned from the simplicity that is in Christ." Whatever your situation or circumstances may be, God's command to you is, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Even "the friendship of the world, if unduly sought or delighted in, is enmity with God." Beware then how in heart and affection you return to the world. "Remember Lot's wife." "After once putting your hand to the plough, you must never look back again." Methinks, if you would duly consider the image by which such apostasy is represented in the words following my text, you never could return to the world. One scarcely knows how even to quote the Scripture itself; so exceedingly does one nauseate the ideas suggested in it, and so utterly do one's feelings revolt from it. But it does paint the world, and all who love it, in very humiliating colors. O that all the votaries of gaiety, and fashion, and pleasure could but hear what the Apostle compares them to; even to "swine wallowing in the mire!" and that all who are tempted to conform to them, could be brought to reflect on "a dog returning to his own vomit again!" Yes, brethren, this is the feast to which your earthly friends invite you. Ah! learn to view the world as God views it: learn to regard it as a country infected with the plague: and let your great concern be to get through it in safety. Go not unnecessarily where the infection rages most: but "come out from among them, and be separate; and touch not the unclean thing." And, as it was the knowledge of Christ which first brought you forth from the world and its pollutions, seek to "grow in the knowledge of your adorable Lord and Savior," that, through the abundance of his grace communicated to you, you may live more than ever unto God; and that, "shining already as lights in the world," your "path may shine brighter and brighter unto the perfect day."

MMCCCCXXVI

The Day of Judgment

[2 Peter 3:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 3.7). The day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

A FUTURE state of rewards and punishments is, in theory, universally acknowledged; but, in practice, it is grievously forgotten, and, by not a few, is held in derision. Because God delays to execute his threatenings against ungodly men, they imagine that he never will execute them. Just as in the days of Noah, because the menaced deluge was suspended for one hundred and twenty years, it was to multitudes an object of scorn; so now the idea of an universal conflagration, when "the heavens and the earth shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burnt up," is deemed a fable; and the destruction which will then come upon the whole ungodly world is disregarded, as the dream of a fanatical or superstitious mind. The day of judgment, it is hoped, will prove alike favorable to all; and no great difference be put between the righteous and the wicked. But the name given to that day deserves particular attention: and I beg you to attend to it, with the humility that becomes you, while I open to you,

I. The terms by which the day of judgment is here designated.

It is called "The day of the perdition of ungodly men." Let us consider,

1. Why it is so called.

As, at that period, rewards and punishments will be alike distributed, one would suppose that that day might with equal propriety be called "the day of the salvation of godly men." But this designation would by no means be so proper as that which is given to it in my text. For, though the salvation of the godly will be then completed, it will not then be begun: it is begun in this world: the saints, as soon as they believe in Christ, "receive the end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls," nor is there any one blessing which they shall ever enjoy in Heaven, but is now conferred upon them through the medium of faith; insomuch, that they are represented by Paul as already "sitting in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Their bodies will indeed be then partakers with their souls in the felicity of Heaven; but, as far as their souls are concerned, they have already, even while here upon earth, an earnest and foretaste of their heavenly inheritance. The ungodly, on the other hand, have to wait for their award until the day of judgment. I say not, indeed, but that God does sometimes make them to feel a foretaste of his wrath even here; but, generally speaking, they are left to pass their time here under a fearful delusion, by which they pacify their consciences, and lull themselves asleep in their sins. They are under condemnation now, as much as ever they will be: as it is said, "He who believes not, is condemned already, because he believes not in the name of the only-begotten Son of God," but the day of execution is that which is specified in my text: and so Jude expressly calls it; "Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, The Lord comes with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodily committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him." And the great use of the judgment will be, to display before the whole assembled universe the justice of God in inflicting on the wicked this punishment, while so different a portion is given to the righteous: as Paul has said; "It is the day of wrath, and of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God." Hence there is a peculiar propriety in that name, by which the day of judgment is designated, in my text, "The day of the perdition of ungodly men."

2. That it will so prove.

Doubtless, at the time of our death, a suitable award is made to every man: but at the day of judgment there will be a public assignment of this doom to every individual of mankind, attended with solemnities which will greatly augment the keenness of their perceptions; and the bodies of all will be made partakers of the sentence that shall be accorded to their souls. In that day every child of man, from the very beginning to the end of time, will be called forth, and summoned to appear before their God. "The sea will give up the dead which were in it; and death and Hell will deliver up the dead which were in them: and all will be judged according to their works: and whoever is not found written in the book of life, will be cast into the lake of fire." Then will be a separation between the righteous and the wicked, even as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats; and then shall the wicked go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal." Yes, truly, this separation shall take place; for "the wicked," whatever they may now imagine, "shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous."

And now let me endeavor to place before you,

II. The considerations which such a view of the judgment should suggest to our minds.

And surely it should lead us,

1. To inquire into our own real character.

At that day, the Judge will not determine according to our partial views, but according to his own most righteous law: and, whatever may have been the line chosen by ourselves, he will bring our conduct to that infallible test, and determine our doom in perfect accordance with is.

Now, in that day, the ungodly, of every class, will be sentenced to perdition. Paul appeals to us respecting this: "Know you not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?" And then he guards us against that self-deception to which we are so prone; "Be not deceived," and then, enumerating a sad catalogue of persons addicted to wickedness, as fornicators, adulterers, drunkards, revilers, and extortioners, he declares that no one of them "shall ever inherit the kingdom of God." To these may be added "the impenitent" and "unbelieving, as sure to take their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone." Nor must we omit the unregenerate, even though their lives may have been as exemplary as that of Nicodemus himself: for, "except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Care, too, must be taken not to deceive ourselves in relation to our own experience: for there is much hypocrisy in the human heart; and "a hypocrite, even though his excellency mount up to the heavens, and reach unto the clouds, will be detected by God, and will perish forever, like his own dung;" so that his former admirers, with a mixture of surprise and grief, will say, "Where is he?" The apostate too, however eminent his profession may have been, will share the same fate. The man who turns back, "turns back to inevitable and everlasting perdition;" and plunges himself into deeper misery than he would ever have experienced if he had never known the way of righteousness at all. Seeing, then, that so many must perish, is it not of vast importance that we ascertain our true character, in order that we may know what doom we are to expect? Yes, beloved, to all of you I would most affectionately say, "Judge yourselves, that you be not judged of the Lord."

2. To realize in our minds the terrors of that day.

Paul, "knowing the terrors of the Lord, persuaded men." And we, too, should meditate upon them, in order to stimulate our souls to a holy activity in the ways of God. Consider how many millions of our fellow-creatures will in that day "call upon the rocks to fall upon them, and the hills to cover them from the wrath of that Lamb," whom here they neglected and despised! What "fearfulness, too, will surprise the hypocrites," who indulged the vain conceit that their specious conduct would find a happier issue! and with what bitter cries will they exclaim, "Who among us can dwell with the devouring fire? Who can dwell with everlasting burnings?" In vain will they knock at the gate of Heaven, crying, "Lord, Lord, open to us;" since they were content with the lamp of outward profession, without the oil of true grace in their hearts. Some will venture even to expostulate with God, as though they had been hardly treated: "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name, and in your name cast out devils, and in your name done many wonderful works?" But they will be repelled with that indignant reproof, "I never knew you: depart from me, you who wrought iniquity." O, the millions, the countless millions, that will perish in that day; all of them "drinking of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation, and be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb; and the smoke of their torment will ascend up forever and ever: and they will have no rest day nor night! Who can reflect on this, and not determine, through grace, to shun so awful a doom, and to make "the long-suffering of God the means and prelude of everlasting salvation?"

3. To improve to the uttermost the advantages we now enjoy.

This is the day of grace; "this is the day of salvation," to every soul that desires to be saved. Yes, truly, "God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance, and live." Do but consider this, my brethren: you will never have to cast the blame of your condemnation upon God. If the day of judgment prove the day of perdition to your souls, the fault will be utterly your own. There is no want of sufficiency in Christ to save any who shall come unto God by him. Nor is there in him any want of willingness to save even the chief of sinners. Of those who rejected him in the days of old, and provoked him to abandon them to utter destruction, he complained, "How often would I have gathered you, even as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and you would not!" The same may he say of you in the day of judgment. Be diligent, then, in the use of all the appointed means of salvation. Repent of all your sins: believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world. Flee to him for refuge: lay hold upon him: hide yourselves under the shadow of his wings: and then, in that awful day, when all who offend and do wickedly shall be cast out, you shall stand before him with great boldness, and "be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless."

MMCCCCXXVII

God's Forbearance

[2 Peter 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 3.8), [9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Peter 3.9). Beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

THE compassion of Almighty God has in all ages been abused by ungodly men, and made an occasion of impenitence and persevering wickedness. In the minds of many it has been made a source of triumph against God, as though he were not able or willing to vindicate the honor of his law. Just as our blessed Lord's condescension in noticing an abandoned, but penitent, woman was made by his enemies a reason for doubting whether he was a prophet—since, if he had been really inspired of God, he must have known how unworthy she was of such an honor; so the forbearance of God with an ungodly world has given occasion to "scoffers to say, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." But such persons forget, that, however long God may have borne with the wickedness of men, he has given at the deluge a very awful testimony of his determination to punish it. And, though he now bears with sinners, he reserves the earth for a similar display of his vengeance by fire; and will surely, in due season, execute his threatenings against sin and sinners. In the mean time, however, he waits to be gracious to returning penitents, and will gladly lay aside his anger the very instant that they come to him in his appointed way.

The words which I have now read will naturally lead me to show,

I. In what light God's delay of his final judgment should be viewed.

God forbears to punish sinners, because he desires to save them.

Scoffers, indeed, impute it to weakness or indifference; and take occasion from it to cast reflections on God himself, as either not seeing, or not regarding, the wickedness of men: since, if he did see it, and did regard it as he professes to do, it would not be possible for him to pass it over from year to year in the way he does. But such persons forget, that time, which to us appears long, has, in fact, no existence before God. All things past, present, and future, are alike present with him, and form in his mind but a single point: "One day is with him as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." Men are afraid to suspend the exercise of their displeasure for a number of years, lest they should be considered as acting from policy, or a sense of weakness and fear. But with God there is no scope for any such views or feelings. He is able to punish whensoever he will: nor is it possible for any to escape from his hands. He, however, is averse to proceed to extremities, until he has used every possible method to reclaim sinners, and to open a way for the exercise of his mercy towards them. "He is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness." He is kept back, not by any conscious weakness, or by indifference, or by fear, or by any other motive which may be supposed to influence us: he is restrained by long-suffering alone, and by a desire to spare those who have deserved punishment.

He desires to save every child of man.

"He is not willing that any should perish," no; he would not that so much as one should ever become a monument of his indignation. This he affirms in the strongest manner; yes, and confirms his assertion with an oath: "As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live." It is surprising, that any, after such a declaration as this, should maintain the doctrine of absolute reprobation. Were that, or any other doctrine, clearly revealed in the Holy Scriptures, I should feel it my duty to receive it with the simplicity of a little child: but to receive it merely as a deduction of human reason, an inference drawn by weak and fallible man from the doctrine of election, when the whole Scriptures uniformly declare the very reverse, is, to say the least, very dangerous, and exceeding sinful. I know it is said of ungodly men, by Jude, that "they were of old ordained to this condemnation." I know, also, that Peter says of many, that they "stumbled at the word, being disobedient, whereunto also they were appointed." But it is not of individuals that these Apostles speak, but of characters. God has ordained, that they who will not receive the truth with humility shall stumble at it; and that they who will resist the faith which he has delivered to his saints, shall be left to turn the grace of God into lasciviousness, and to deny the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. And this is a wise and righteous appointment. But it is a far different thing from creating any with a fixed determination to consign them over to perdition, purely of his own arbitrary will, without any fault of theirs. Such an idea as this is directly contradicted by the assertion in my text: and by the oath which I have before mentioned; and by numberless other portions of Scripture, which can admit of no doubt. Our blessed Lord said to his hearers, "You will not come to me, that you may have life," and to the Jews, even after they were given up to the judgments they had merited, he said, "O that you had known, even you, at least in this your day, the things that belong unto your peace! but now they are hid from your eyes." And again: "How often would I have gathered you, even as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, but you would not." The whole Scripture attests, that "God would rather that all should come to repentance and live." He "commands all men everywhere to repent." He exhorts them to it also; saying, "Turn you, turn you from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?" and he declares to all, without exception, "Him that comes unto me, I will in no wise cast out." Now shall we, in deference to human systems, set aside all these passages of holy writ? God forbid: we dare not do so: and if we cannot mark out the precise boundaries where truths of an opposite aspect meet, we are contented to say, "What I know not now, I shall know hereafter." If we choose to speculate on divine truths, we may soon get out of our depth: but if we will practically apply them to our own souls, we shall find them as clear as we can wish. Where is the man who has not experienced more or less the strivings of God's Spirit in his soul? Who among us has not a consciousness that he has resisted those strivings; and that, if he had made a due improvement of them, "God would have given him more grace?" The truth, then, is plain: if God forbear to execute upon the world the judgments we deserve, it is not because he is indifferent about our proceedings, but because he is long-suffering towards us, and desirous, if we would improve the opportunity, to save us all. This is the true reason why "he endures, with such astonishing forbearance, the vessels of wrath who are fitted for destruction."

Having seen the long-suffering of God towards this sinful world, let us consider,

II. What improvement we should make of it.

From a sense of it, we should be led,

1. To acknowledge our obligations to him.

Who among us has not reason to acknowledge the long-suffering of God towards him? Who is not a sinner before God? Who has not merited his wrathful indignation? Who might not, on ten thousand occasions, have justly been cut off, and made a monument of God's righteous displeasure?—Let us not, then, impute his forbearance to any indifference in him respecting us, but to its true source, his tender compassion, and unbounded mercy.

2. To humble ourselves before him.

"Because judgment against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of too many are fully set in them to do evil." But let it not be so with us. Paul tells us, that the true intent of "God's patience and long-suffering is, to lead us to repentance." Let it operate upon us in this manner; and let us humble ourselves before him in dust and ashes.

3. To justify him in his judgments.

Whatever men may urge against the denunciations of God's wrath, we are sure he will be justified in every sentence which he shall pass, and be just in every judgment which he shall inflict. The man who had not on the wedding-garment was speechless, when called to an account for his neglect. He might have said, "Lord, I was called suddenly, and compelled to come in," and had not time to procure the requisite apparel. But there was no room for any such excuse. The Master of the feast would have provided him with the garment; but he would not deign to ask for it. Therefore, when cast into outer darkness, he had not a word to say in vindication of himself, or to criminate his Lord. And so, when sentence shall be past on those who despise the forbearance of their God, the whole host of Heaven will cry, "Righteous and true are your ways, you King of saints."

4. To improve the time that may be yet allotted to us.

God is now "giving us space to repent." But how soon his patience may come to an end, we know not. We see persons taken away at every period of life—Let not another day pass unimproved; but "today, while it is called today, turn unto the Lord, and seek him with your whole hearts."

MMCCCCXXVIII

The Day of Judgment

[2 Peter 3:10–14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 3.10â14). The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that you look for such things, be diligent that you may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.

BUT have we never contemplated our own situation? Have we never considered that the solemnities of the judgment day are now in actual preparation; and that, not our own individual dwelling, or friends only, will be affected by them, but the whole universe? Our minds are at this time justly, and almost exclusively, engrossed with the consideration of this tremendous plot, which God, in mercy to this whole nation, has defeated. And I hope rather to strengthen, than efface, those impressions, by leading you to contemplate,

I. The events predicted in our text.

These are widely different indeed from each other; but they are inseparably connected, and infallibly simultaneous. Let us consider,

1. The dissolution of this present world.

Once the world and everything in it, with the exception of that small portion contained in the ark, was destroyed by water: and there is a time coming when the whole of it without exception will be destroyed by fire. Of the latter there will be no more expectation at the time, than there was of the former. In the days of Noah they were eating and drinking, and marrying and giving in marriage, as securely as at any former period of the world: and would not believe that they were in any danger, until, on the entrance of Noah into the ark, the flood came and destroyed them all. So, at the last day, the inhabitants of this globe will be as little occupied with the thoughts of judgment, as we are at this moment. Our Lord tells us, that "he will come as a thief in the night;" that, without any previous warning, the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the earth, with everything in it, shall be burnt up."

Conceive now the feelings of men at the very first moment that this tremendous and irresistible combustion shall burst forth. Some faint idea may be entertained, if only you suppose that the plot, which God in his mercy has defeated, had been accomplished. Conceive the company that was assembled, either as partaking of the friendly repast, or as deliberating on the affairs of state, and consulting with each other for the welfare of the nation: conceive of them as beholding the desolating instrument cast in among them, and ready in a few moments to execute its destined office: with what terror would they be filled! and, if a moment were allowed for an ejaculatory petition, with what ardor would they implore mercy for their souls! Thus will it be in every quarter of the globe. All, except the remnant, who, in the habit of their minds, have been dying daily, will be ready to "call upon the rocks and mountains to fall upon them, and to cover them from the wrath of the Lamb," whose judgment they dread.

But to that happy remnant another scene will open: for to them shall be revealed,

2. The establishment of a new and better state.

They, "according to God's promise, are even now looking for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness," and then shall that new state open to their view. In the bold and figurative language of prophecy, the Millennial state is sometimes described under these terms—and well it may be; since, when compared with the present state of things, wherein iniquity so awfully abounds, it will be indeed "a new creation." But the period here spoken of is contemporaneous with the final judgment; and, consequently, must refer to Heaven itself, where neither sin nor sorrow can ever dwell. That is the period of which John speaks, when he says, "I saw a new Heaven, and a new earth: for the first Heaven and the first earth were passed away … and there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defiles."

Contemplate the feelings of the godly at the moment that this glory bursts upon them. In vain shall we look for anything with which to compare it upon earth. Alas! the visions of the godly are not so bright; nor do their sublimest raptures make so deep an impression as do the terrors which are inspired by sudden and appalling danger. But, as contrasted with the feelings of the ungodly, we may conceive in some little measure their bliss. Let us picture to ourselves the Rich Man and Lazarus, entering at the same moment into the eternal world, the one beholding the abyss of Hell ready to swallow him up, and the other fixing his eyes upon his God and Savior, whose glory and felicity he is about to share. But

We shall contemplate these things to more advantage, if we view them in connection with,

II. The effect which the prospect of those events should produce upon us.

This the Apostle sets forth,

1. In a way of candid appeal.

We all look for these events; nor do any of us doubt but that they will come in due season. Let me then ask of all who are here present, "What manner of persons ought you to be?" Should you not be waiting for that period "in all holy conversation and godliness?" Should you not be "looking for it, and hastening unto it" with a holy eagerness, to meet "your God at his coming?" As for the things of this life, they should be as nothing in our eyes. Being so soon to part with them all, we should sit loose to them; as the Apostle says; "They who have wives should be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passes away." I well know, that, when such a state of mind is recommended by us, we appear to require more than is necessary. But I will venture to appeal to every considerate man, whether this be not the conversation that becomes us, when our God is coming to judgment; and when he has told us that "he will come as a thief in the night?" Would it not be madness to be dreaming of "peace and safety, until sudden and everlasting destruction come upon use?" The wise virgins were not wise in this respect, that, like the foolish virgins, they slumbered and slept. Happily for them, they had oil in their vessels with their lamps; or else, with the foolish virgins, they also would have been excluded from the nuptial feast. The true frame for all of us to be in, is that of ardent and affectionate expectation; "our loins being girt, and our lamps trimmed," and our whole souls as "those who wait for the coming of their Lord." Maintaining this frame, you may rest assured, that "the Lord Jesus Christ will confirm you to the end," and present you faultless before the presence of his Father's glory with exceeding joy."

2. In a way of affectionate entreaty.

"Beloved" brethren, "seeing that you look for such things, I beseech you be diligent that you may be found of God in peace, without spot and blameless." Think, if that day should come upon you unprepared; and, instead of going forth to meet a loving Savior, you should behold only an angry and avenging Judge; how terrible will this be! Lose not an hour then; but be diligent in seeking peace with God through the Son of his love. It is the blood of Christ, and that only, which can effect your reconciliation with God: and therefore lose not a moment in sprinkling it upon your souls; yes, let your holiest actions, as well as your more acknowledged sins, be purged with it from their defilement. Endeavor, too, to preserve a "spotless and blameless" conduct throughout your whole lives, being "sincere and without offence until the day of Christ." Let no allowed sin be found in you: but so "cleanse yourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, that you may perfect holiness in the fear of God," and be acknowledged by him as "Israelites indeed, in whom there was no deceit." This will doubtless require "diligence," but surely the occasion justly deserves all the care and labor you can bestow upon it. Can you doubt whether those, whose lives have been lately in such imminent peril, have taken precautions against any future surprise? Would they not be justly blamed, if they were to be as heedless of danger, as they were before they knew of the conspiracy that was formed against them? Be then on your guard. They, whatever attempts were made against them, might escape: but no possibility of escape remains for you. "Your God will come, even as a thief in the night;" and therefore I entreat you all to be diligent, that, "whether he come in the evening, or at midnight, or at cock-crowing, or in the morning," "you may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless."

I only add, "Account the long-suffering of God to be salvation." You have long been spared; and God is still forbearing to call you to your great account. "Beloved brethren," "despise not this goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering of your God; but let them lead you to repentance." Though the general judgment should be long deferred, your own particular doom will be fixed the very instant that you shall be summoned into the eternal world. Do not then delay until it be too late; but "today, while it is called today, harden not your hearts," lest God cut you off in your sins, and "swear in his wrath that you shall never enter into his rest."

MMCCCCXXIX

Growth in Grace

[2 Peter 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 3.17), [18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Peter 3.18). You therefore, beloved, seeing you know these things before, beware lest you also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

HOWEVER averse men are to receive warnings and exhortations from each other, there is, in reality, no greater proof of affection, than the administering of faithful cautions, and beneficial advice, to those whom we love. It is evident how much Peter's mind was warmed with affection towards his brethren, since he, no less than four times in this short chapter, addresses them by that endearing term, "Beloved." And how did he testify his love, but by guarding them against the dangers to which they were exposed, and by prescribing to them the most effectual means of deliverance and safety?

Let his word then be thankfully received by us, while we consider,

I. His caution against apostasy.

The wicked will take occasion from God's forbearance to question his remunerative justice—and even the godly need to be on their guard against the influence of this delusion. Certain it is, that they are liable to fall from their own steadfastness; and that, without the greatest vigilance, they will do so—But they "know" the certainty and awfulness of the day of judgment, and should therefore be afraid of meeting it unprepared. It will then be too late to rectify their "errors," or repent of their instability; and this consideration should make them doubly cautious against every occasion of falling.

II. His direction for preventing it.

The Christian should seek to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

None, who have received grace, will be satisfied with the measure they have received; but they will be seeking to attain more and more. Nor will any, who know Christ, think they "know anything yet as they ought to know," they will perceive that there are in him "treasures of knowledge," which they have never explored, and which to all eternity will be progressively opening to their view.

Hence the Christian's duty is to be continually advancing in every part of the divine life; and to "make his profiting appear unto all men."

This will be his best, his only, preservative against apostasy.

Painting or statuary admit of intermissions in labor: such work, left for a season, may be resumed without any increased difficulty: but, in religion, every intermission is a positive injury: if the work proceed not, it declines: it always either waxes or wanes. Now every declension weakens the vital principle within us—restores to activity our dormant corruptions—exposes us to the assaults of our great adversary—and provokes God to withdraw his accustomed aid: consequently, our downfall begun, will, if not prevented by sovereign grace, be speedy, gradual, irretrievable. On the other hand, a progress in grace confirms every good habit—fastens round us the whole armor of God—keeps our enemy at a distance—and secures to us the continued protection of Heaven. Go on adding to your grace, says God, "and you shall never fall."

Advice.

1. Reflect much and often on the day of judgment.

Through a forgetfulness of that day we become the sport of every temptation: but if we would frequently endeavor to realize the strictness of the scrutiny, and the severity of the judgment which will then take place, we should be more fortified against error in principle, or evil in practice. We must expect our Lord's coming, if we would be found ready on his arrival.

2. Be diligent in the use of all the means of grace.

It is in vain to hope that we shall grow in grace or knowledge, if we do not use the means which God has appointed. But, if we watch unto prayer, and conscientiously devote ourselves to him, he will "bless us with all spiritual blessings," "our faith and love shall grow exceedingly;" our "hope shall abound through the power of the Holy Spirit," and, from being "babes," we shall become "children, young men, and fathers in Christ," and, having attained at last "the measure of the full stature of Christ," we shall "enter into his joy," and be partakers of his glory for evermore.

***~~1 JOHN~~***

***~~#2430~~***

***~~THE BENEFITS ARISING FROM SALVATION~~***

***~~[1 John 1:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 1.1-3)~~***

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ."

It is impossible to read these words, and not be struck with the extreme earnestness of the Apostle in his mode of giving the testimony before us. It seems evident that the truths which he affirms had been much controverted; and that the evidence on which they rested had been called in question. And the fact was, that many heresies had arisen even while he was yet alive.

Some even went so far as to deny that Jesus had ever died and risen again: they asserted that all those transactions, which were recorded of him by the Evangelists, had taken place in appearance only, and not in reality. Against such absurd and impious conceits, John, now at a very advanced age, bore his testimony with a zeal suited to the occasion. He was the only surviving witness of the events referred to; and hence he repeats, even to tautology, the evidence which he had had again and again, from all his senses, respecting the truth of all that he affirmed: and he urges upon the whole Christian Church the reception of his testimony, by representing the incalculable benefits which all who believed it would receive.

That we may enter fully into the declarations before us, let us consider,

***~~I. John's testimony—~~***

***~~This may be understood as relating to the Gospel generally—~~***

The Gospel is certainly called "the word of life, [Philippians 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 2.16);" and it was from eternity hidden "with the Father, [Ephesians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 3.9)," and at last, "at the beginning" of the Gospel dispensation must of necessity be so understood in other parts of this epistle; 2:7, 24 and 3:11, was manifested to the Apostles, [Romans 16:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 16.25-26), who had every possible means of examining and ascertaining the truth of it.

"Seeing and hearing" of the truth are applied to Christ, as well as to the Apostles, [John 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 3.11) with [John 8:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 8.26); [John 8:38](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 8.38); and who, in consequence of the fullest conviction in their own minds, "bore witness" to it as the means by which alone eternal life could be obtained, [Mark 16:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark 16.16). This sense, I say, the words before us may very properly bear: and, inasmuch as the Gospel is elsewhere denominated "the word of life," (which Christ is not;) and the words "from the beginning, [1 John 2:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 2.13-14)," generally, though not always in the Epistles of John, import, "from the beginning of the Gospel dispensation," it is by no means improbable that this may be the true sense of the passage.

On the other hand, his mode of expression is far less proper, if applied to the Gospel, than if applied personally to the Lord Jesus Christ; to whom the generality of commentators suppose the Apostle to refer. We therefore observe, that:

***~~It may be understood also as relating personally to the Lord Jesus Christ—~~***

He, though not called "the word of life," is constantly known as "The Word, [Revelation 19:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 19.13);" He also is called "The Life, [John 11:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 11.25)." and what seems more particularly to determine the point is, that he is in this very epistle called, "Eternal Life." "This is the true God, and Eternal Life, [1 John 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 5.20)." He too was from eternity "with the Father, [John 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.18)," and in due time "was manifest in the flesh, [1 Timothy 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Tim 3.16)." And it was his existence that was so determinately denied by the heretics whom the Apostle wished to silence.

He, too, not only had lived in closest intimacy with his disciples before his crucifixion, but, after his death and resurrection, had appeared to them for forty days; and, when they doubted whether it were he, or whether it was not a spirit whom they saw, he said to them, "Handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones, as you see me have, [Luke 24:39](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 24.39)."

Now, if we consider the Apostle as speaking personally of *Jesus*, we can account for the vast variety of expressions tending to confirm the testimony which be bore respecting him. Whereas, if we apply the expressions to *the Gospel*, the terms are multiplied far beyond what the occasion called for, and the metaphors are stronger than he could with propriety use.

Besides, if we understand him as speaking of Christ personally, there is a remarkable coincidence between the beginning of this epistle of John, and the beginning of his Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word: and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God." "In him was life; and the life was the light of men." And "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us; and we behold his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, [John 1:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.1-4); [John 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.14)."

But, whether we understand the expressions as relating to the Gospel of Christ, or to his person:

***~~It must of necessity be understood as declaring that in Christ Jesus there is life, even eternal life—~~***

The Apostle testified of Christ, as he says in a subsequent chapter of this epistle: "We have seen and do testify, that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world, [1 John 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 4.14)." If we inquire more particularly what the substance of his testimony was, he informs us: "This is the witness of God which he has testified of his Son." "And this is the 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 5:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 5.9); [1 John 5:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 5.11-12)."

Thus we see, in fact, that, whether we understand the passage as speaking of the Gospel, or of Christ himself, it comes to the same point.

If *the Gospel*is spoken of, it is as revealing Christ.

If *Christ*is spoken of, it is as revealed in the Gospel.

Or, in other words, as being "the way, the truth, and the life, [John 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 14.6)."

Bear in mind then, that all that is spoken of Christ in the holy Gospels is true: the Apostles were ear-witnesses, and eye-witnesses, of it, even of all that they relate: "They did not follow cunningly-devised fables, when they made known the power and coming of the Lord Jesus, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty: for they were with him in the holy mount, when he received from God the Father honor and glory, and when there came to him a voice from the excellent glory, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, [2 Peter 1:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 1.16-18)." Whether therefore they speak of his sufferings or his glory, their testimony may be relied on. We may be sure that in Him is salvation, and in Him alone.

The extreme urgency of the Apostle in commending to us his testimony, leads us to contemplate,

***~~II. The benefit of receiving John's testimony—~~***

***~~The Apostles themselves were brought into a most exalted state through faith in this Divine Savior—~~***

Hear what the Apostle speaks respecting it: "Truly," says he, "our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." By the Lord Jesus Christ they were brought into a state of reconciliation with God; and were enabled to regard him in the endearing character of a Father. "Through Him too, and by the Holy Spirit, they had access to God, [Ephesians 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 2.18)," at all times, pouring out their hearts before him, making known to him their every need, and committing to him their every care.

Through the same divine channel, God descended into their bosoms:  
revealing to them his will,  
communicating to them his grace, and  
shedding abroad in their hearts a sense of his love.

Nay more, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit had come down and taken up their residence within them, dwelling in them as in a temple, and manifesting to them, as far as they were capable of beholding it, all the glory of the Godhead, [John 14:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 14.16-18); [John 14:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 14.21); [John 14:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 14.23). From hence arose within them inconceivable peace and joy, which were to them a pledge and foretaste of their heavenly inheritance; for they "knew that Christ was in the Father, and in them also; and that they too were in him, [John 14:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 14.20)."

Such had been their happy state from the first moment that they had believed in Christ; more sparingly indeed in the first instance, but progressively advancing as their knowledge of Christ became more intimate, and their affiance in him more entire.

***~~And we also, by the same faith, are brought to a participation of all the same privileges—~~***

"These things," says the Apostle, "we declare unto you, that you may have fellowship with us." And in what does that fellowship consist, but in a participation of all the same privileges and blessings which they enjoyed? And this is indeed the portion of all who receive their testimony aright. All believers are brought into one family, of which Christ is the Head, [Ephesians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 1.10); [Ephesians 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 3.15). The moment we believe, "we come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and Church of the first-born which are written in Heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the New Covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, which speaks better things than that of Abel, [Hebrews 12:22-24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 12.22-24)."

Now here we see the whole family: here is God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ the mediator; here also are the angels who never sinned, and all the hosts of the redeemed in Heaven, and all the saints that are still on earth. All are brought together into one family, and all have fellowship with each other as the head and the members of the same body: so that every individual believer now has the same fellowship with the Apostles, as they had with each other and with the prophets who had gone before them; and the same "fellowship too with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ."

Does this appear too strong? It is not so strong as what our blessed Savior himself has spoken upon the subject. For he not only declares to us, that "both He and his Father will come to us, and make their abode with us, [John 14:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 14.23);" but he declared to his Father also, "I have given them the glory which you gave me, that they may be one, even as we are one; I in them, and you in me, that they may be made perfect in one, [John 17:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 17.21-23)." Here, I say, the union of the different members of his body is compared with the union which exists between the different persons of the Godhead, than which nothing can be conceived so entire, so mysterious, so unchangeable.

Know then, that this is the state into which you will be brought, if only you receive the testimony of God respecting his dear Son. Believe truly, that "in him is life," and that through faith in him your souls shall live; and then all the fullness of these blessings shall be yours. Nor shall even the beloved Apostle himself possess a blessing, of which you shall not, according to your capacity, partake with him.

And here let me say, that, if all the repetition which the Apostle makes use of in my text had been multiplied a hundred-fold, it would not have been too much for the occasion; since nothing can exceed the misery of those who reject this testimony, or the happiness of those who truly receive it.

***~~Contemplate now, I beg you, the object which the Apostle had in view in all these earnest solicitations—~~***

"These things," says he, "I write unto you, that your joy may be full, verse 4." It was for this end that our blessed Lord himself had so strongly and so continually inculcated them: "These things speak I in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves, [John 17:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 17.13)." And this is the object which I also would endeavor to attain.

Beloved brethren, consider how unspeakable must be the joy of being brought into fellowship with the Apostles in all that they ever did, or ever shall, possess!

All that access to God,  
all that fellowship with God,  
all that sense of Christ's incomprehensible love,  
all that enjoyment of his presence,  
and all that fruition of his glory!

It is all yours by promise and by oath, if only you truly believe in Christ! O, put it not from you: defer not to seek it, yes, to seek it with your whole hearts! Then shall you know what it is to have a Heaven upon earth: for, though now you see not, the Lord Jesus with your bodily eyes—yet shall you, by believing, be brought into such communion with him, that your joy in him shall be unspeakable and full of glory, [1 Peter 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Pet 1.8)."

***~~#2431~~***

***~~THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING CONFORMED TO GOD'S IMAGE~~***

***~~[1 John 1:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 1.5-7)~~***

"This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."

In fulfilling the ministerial office, it is not sufficient that we set before our people the evidences of Christianity, or inculcate the performance of some moral duties. We are messengers from God to men; and we must "declare to them the message which we have received from him." We must not alter or conceal any part of that message which we have been commanded to deliver; but must make known the whole counsel of God; and, having declared it with all plainness and fidelity, must urge the acceptance of it with all the energy we possess.

We have a message then from God to you! We are commanded to open to you the Divine character, and to call you by the most impressive arguments to become conformed to his image. In discharging this duty we proceed to set before you:

***~~I. The character of God—~~***

The term "light," in Scripture, has various acceptations; but there are two things which we shall notice as more particularly comprehended in it in the words before us. It is the property of light to reveal all things; it is perfectly pure and incapable of pollution. When therefore it is said, that "God is light," we must understand it as designating,

***~~1. His infinite knowledge—~~***

God is "a God of knowledge, [1 Samuel 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Sam 2.3)." "There is no creature which is not manifest in his sight."

The transactions of darkness are not hidden from him:  
He sees the adulterer, that avails himself of the darkness of the night to visit his guilty paramour.  
His eye is upon the thief, that lays his hand upon his neighbor's property.  
He notices the fraudulent dealer, who sells by false weights and measures, or takes advantage of the purchaser's ignorance to get rid of a bad commodity, and to exact of him a higher price than it is worth.

Nor is it the *actions*only that God inspects; his eyes are not only on our ways, but on our very *hearts!* We are apt to think that "the thick clouds are a covering to him, so that he cannot see, [Job 22:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 22.13-14)."

But "the darkness and light to him are both alike! [Psalm 139:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 139.11-12)."

"He searches the heart, and tries the thoughts! [Jeremiah 17:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 17.10)."

"He knows the things that come into our minds, every one of them! [Ezekiel 11:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 11.5)."

"He weighs our motives! [Proverbs 16:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 16.2)."

He discerns the precise quantity of good or evil that there is in all our thoughts and desires.

Yes, "He knows the imaginations that we go about, even now, years before" the thoughts are distinctly formed in our hearts [Deuteronomy 31:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 31.21).

Our inmost souls are as much open to his view, as the sacrifices were to the priest, when he had flayed them for the purpose of examining the flesh, and cut them open to inspect their inward parts. This is the idea suggested in [Hebrews 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 4.13).

In short, "with him is no darkness at all!" "Hell and destruction are before him; much more the hearts of men! [Proverbs 15:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 15.11)."

***~~2. His unspotted holiness—~~***

"Light" is perhaps the only thing which is incapable of being polluted; and therefore is peculiarly fit to represent the immaculate purity of God.

God is a holy Being; yes, "glorious in holiness," as well as in every other perfection. "He hates all the workers of iniquity:" "He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, [Habakkuk 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hab 1.13)," without the utmost abhorrence of it. In this respect also, as well as in the former, "there is no darkness at all in him:" there is none in his nature; there is none in his dispensations.

Consider his nature:

Which of his attributes has the smallest mixture of unholiness?

His *sovereignty*is not a weak partiality, but a holy exertion of his will, according to his own determinate and eternal counsels.

His *justice*is not a rigorous severity, but a holy regard to the honor of his broken law.

His *mercy*is not a weak exercise of pity at the expense of justice and truth, but a holy display of his unbounded compassion, in a way that at the same time illustrates and magnifies all his other perfections.

Consider his providences: these, it is true, are oftentimes inscrutable to us; yet is he "righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works, [Psalm 145:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 145.17)." We are sometimes indeed ready, through unbelief, to question his wisdom and his goodness, [Psalm 73:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 73.12-14). When we see the wicked triumphing, and the righteous suffering under the accumulated trials of persecution from man and desertion from God—we are apt to be offended, and to ask, whether there is a God that rules in the earth? But in both these respects is his holiness expressly vindicated in the sacred writings. The *martyrs*that are now in glory, at the same time that they expostulate, as it were, with God on the subject of his forbearance towards their persecutors, address him as "holy and true! [Revelation 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 6.10);" and *David*, when complaining bitterly of the dereliction that he suffered, takes especial care to acknowledge that, in the midst of all, his holiness is unimpeached, "O God, I cry in the day-time, but you hear not; and in the night-season I am not silent; but you are holy! [Psalm 22:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 22.1-3)."

When therefore we are not able to comprehend the reason of God's dispensations, we must still confess, that though "clouds and darkness are round about him, righteousness and judgment are the basis of his throne! [Psalm 97:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 97.2)."

The next part of the message points out to us,

***~~II. The necessity and benefit of a conformity to God—~~***

The saints are said to be renewed after the Divine image: and it is worthy of particular observation, that the only two points in which this renovation is said to consist, are knowledge, [Colossians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 3.10), and holiness, [Ephesians 4:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 4.24). We see then from hence wherein that conformity, which we are to attain, consists: it consists in knowledge and in holiness, or, as my text expresses it, in "walking in the light as he is in the light:" our minds must be enlightened with the knowledge of God's truth; and our hearts must be purified in the performance of his will.

Let us notice then,

***~~1. The necessity of this conformity to God—~~***

Many will pretend to have communion with God, while they are ignorant of the salvation revealed in the Gospel, and living in the habitual indulgence of sin. But, while they thus "walk in darkness," what "fellowship can they have with God?" What access can they have to him, when they do not so much as know the way of "access to him through the rent veil of the Redeemer's flesh, [Hebrews 10:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 10.19-20)." *What regard can they feel in their hearts towards him, while they are under the allowed dominion of worldly and carnal lusts?*Their profession is a system of falsehood and hypocrisy! "They lie, and do not the truth:" they may work up themselves to ecstasies if they will; but they neither have, nor can have, any fellowship with God; for how "shall the throne of iniquity (or one in whom sin *reigns*) have fellowship with him, [Psalm 94:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 94.20)." "What fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion has light with darkness, [2 Corinthians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 6.14)."

***~~2. The benefit of this conformity to God—~~***

If a person be walking sincerely and progressively in the study of God's will, and in obedience to it—he possesses two great and unspeakable benefits; namely, communion with God, and acceptance before him.

He has *communion*with God. The opposition between the 6th and 7th, verses shows that, verse 7 does not relate to the communion of the saints with each other, but to their fellowship with God. God loves the humble, diligent, obedient servant: "He will come to him," and "lift, up the light of his countenance upon him," and "manifest himself to him as he does not unto the world." He will "shed abroad his love in his heart," and "give him a spirit of adoption, whereby he shall cry, Abba, Father." The person himself may not be very conversant with raptures: but, whether he be more or less sensible of God's favor to him, it is manifest that he has fellowship with God. His knowledge of the Gospel proves that God has taught him; and his experience of its sanctifying power, proves that God has strengthened and supported him.

He has also *acceptance*before God: he is not like an unpardoned sinner: Jesus Christ has washed away his sins in the fountain of his blood; yes, every day, every hour, every moment, he is cleansing him from the pollution that adheres to his best services. This cleansing is a continued act of Christ, and through it the soul maintains its peace with God, and is regarded by God "without spot or blemish, [Ephesians 5:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 5.26-27)." Cleansed by Jesus from "the iniquity of his holy things," he is presented "faultless before the presence of God's glory with exceeding joy, Jude verse 24."

Such are the benefits of cleaving to Christ, and "walking as he walked," and a life devoted to God is not so properly the *means*of obtaining these benefits, as it is the *evidence*that we already possess them.

***~~From this most instructive subject we may learn,~~***

***~~1. The connection between faith and works—~~***

One man hopes to be saved by his works, while he disregards faith in Christ.

Another hopes that his faith will save him, though it never produces good works.

Both of these deceive their own souls.

For no man can do such works as the Gospel requires, unless he embraces the truths which it reveals. And, if he could do them, they would be utterly insufficient to justify him before God.

On the other hand, "the faith that is without works, is dead," and as it differs not from the faith of devils, so will it bring us no better portion than theirs!

Knowledge is necessary to produce holiness. And holiness is necessary to evince that our knowledge is truly spiritual and saving. It is not by separating them from each other, but by uniting them together, that we are to "walk in the light as God is in the light."

***~~2. The connection between duty and happiness—~~***

The greater part of the world expect happiness in the ways of sin: but God has warned us that there is "no peace to the wicked." *There is no real happiness but in fellowship with God: and there is no fellowship with him, without a conformity to him*. If then we would be happy in this world, we would be pious: we would study to know and do the will of God. Then we would be happy in sickness as well as in health, and in the prospect of death no less than in the midst of earthly enjoyments.

***~~3. The connection between grace and glory—~~***

The saints in glory are called "saints in light;" and in order to partake of their inheritance, we must be "made fit for it, [Colossians 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 1.12)." An unregenerate sinner would not be happy, even if he were in Heaven. There is a total difference of character between those who are saved and those who perish. Those who are saved, love God, and delight in him, and make it the labor of their souls to glorify him: whereas *those who perish would, if they were able, pluck him from his throne! It would be glad tidings to them if they were informed that he exists no longer.*Such precisely is the difference between saints and sinners in this world; the one find all their happiness in serving God; the other say in their hearts, "We wish there were no God." Neither the one nor the other indeed attain the same degree of holiness or wickedness in this world that they will in the next: but in all other respects their characters will continue the same that they are in this life.

If ever then we would have fellowship with God in Heaven, we must begin it here: and, if ever we would dwell with him in the regions of everlasting light, we must now be "brought out of darkness into the marvelous light of his Gospel, [1 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Pet 2.9)," and "walk henceforth as children of the light and of the day, [Ephesians 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 5.8)."

***~~#2432~~***

***~~CONFESSION NECESSARY TO FORGIVENESS~~***

***~~[1 John 1:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 1.8-9)~~***

"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

These words are rendered familiar to our ears by being read almost continually as introductory to the service of our Church. On this account they may appear perhaps the less interesting; though in reality they are, from that very circumstance, commended to us as deserving a more than ordinary attention. The truths indeed which are contained in them are extremely plain and simple: but they are of infinite importance to every man, inasmuch as they declare *the pitiable condition of a self-applauding moralist*, and *the happy condition of a self-condemning penitent*. We shall consider the substance of them under these two heads:

Let us consider,

***~~I. The pitiable condition of a self-applauding moralist—~~***

Persons of a high moral character are too often classed with the Pharisees of old, whose leading feature was hypocrisy. But,

***~~Moral characters are proper objects of our love—~~***

No one can doubt but that morality is highly estimable, even though it does not flow from those divine principles which give it its chief value in the sight of God. So at least Paul thought, when before the whole Jewish council he said, "Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day, [Acts 23:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 23.1)." In this assertion he spoke of his life previous to his conversion. In another place, speaking of the same period, he informs us, that he was, "as concerning the righteousness of the law, blameless;" and, that he had justly considered this as "gain to him, [Philippians 3:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 3.6-7)." And such may morality well be considered, wherever it exists: it is a gain to the person *himself*, in that he is kept from many actual offenses: it is a gain to all his *neighbors*, who cannot but feel a beneficial influence from such a life: and it is a gain to the whole world, as far as the light of such an example can extend.

True it is, that when Paul fully understood the Gospel, he counted all his morality "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, [Philippians 3:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 3.7-9)."

Yet this does not at all derogate from *the intrinsic excellence of morality*: and to speak of morality in the contemptuous and degrading terms which many religious persons, and not a few incautious ministers too, use in reference to it, is extremely erroneous and blameworthy, inasmuch as it tends to lessen men's regard for moral virtue, and to render the Gospel itself odious as hostile to good works.

I would that every disciple of Christ would consider the example of his Divine Master in reference to this very point; and not consider it only, but follow it.

When the Rich Youth came to him, and was directed by him to keep the different commandments of the decalogue, he answered, "Master, all these have I observed from my youth." Now I would ask, What is the treatment which that young man would have experienced from the great mass of religious professors? I greatly fear that the general feeling towards him would have been that of contempt, rather than of love. But how did our blessed Lord and Savior regard him? We are told, "Then Jesus beholding him, loved him, [Mark 10:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark 10.19-21)." And this is the spirit we should manifest towards all who are observant of the Divine laws, though they may not possess that faith in Christ which would stamp a new character upon the whole of their conduct. *In proportion as any man excels in the different branches of moral virtue, he ought to be held as an object of respect, esteem, and love.*

***~~But when they trust in their morality, they deserve our pity—~~***

I do not suppose that any persons would affirm, that they never had sinned at all. I rather conceive, that the Apostle speaks of persons affirming, that they never had sinned to such a degree as to deserve God's wrathful displeasure. This, alas! is too often the effect of morality; that it causes men to overlook their manifold defects, and to be filled with self-delight, when, if they had juster views of themselves, they would be bowed down rather with a sense of their own unworthiness.

Now such persons, however excellent they may be in other respects, are in a truly pitiable condition: for "they deceive themselves."

Moral people may deceive themselves in relation to the extent of their attainments. They do, in fact, say with the Rich Youth, "What yet do I lack?" While "they lack one thing," even that very thing which is indispensable to their acceptance with God. Our Lord brought the young man to the test; and, by a command which he gave, tried him, whether God or the world was the higher in his esteem? It was a grief to the young man to renounce all hope of a saving interest in the Savior; but he knew not how to part with his possessions; and therefore abandoned the Lord Jesus rather than them. So, if moralists were brought to the test, they would show, and indeed they do continually show, that the love of Christ is not dominant in their hearts, and that they have never seen him as that "pearl of great price, for which they are ready to part with all."

Moral people may deceive themselves also in relation to their state before God. They imagine that they do not deserve, and consequently are not in danger of, his wrath and indignation. Thus it was with the Apostle Paul before his conversion. Hear his own acknowledgment respecting it: "I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died [Romans 7:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 7.9);" that is, before I understood the spirituality of the law, I thought my obedience to it so perfect that I was in no danger of condemnation for my offenses against it: but when my eyes were opened to see the extent of its demands and the defects of my obedience, I saw at once that I was deservedly under a sentence of death and condemnation.

Thus it is with multitudes who are exemplary in their moral conduct: in the midst of all their confidence they deceive themselves; and while they take credit to themselves for being right in the sight of God, they show, that they have never yet received "the truth as it is in Jesus," and that, consequently, "the truth is not in them."

Let us now turn our attention to,

***~~II. The happy condition of the self-condemning penitent—~~***

The "confession" which characterizes a true penitent, of course is not to be understood of a mere acknowledgment, but an acknowledgment accompanied with suitable contrition, and with a humble faith in the Lord Jesus. It imports such a confession as was made by the high-priest on the great day of annual expiation, when he laid his hands on the scape-goat, and confessed over him all the sins of all the children of Israel, while all of those whose sins he so transferred were "afflicting their souls before God, [Leviticus 16:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lev 16.21); [Leviticus 16:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lev 16.29-30)." I may add, that this *confession implies also a forsaking of the sins so confessed*; as it is said, "He who covers his sins shall not prosper; but whoever confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy! [Proverbs 28:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 28.13)."

Now respecting all such penitents, I do not hesitate to say, that,

***~~1. Whatever they need shall certainly be given unto them—~~***

Two things the penitent pants after, namely:  
the forgiveness of his sins, and  
the renovation of his soul after the Divine image.

And, behold, these are the very things promised to him in our text: "If we confess our sins, God will forgive our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." How reviving to the contrite soul is such a declaration as this! Here is no limitation as to the number or heinousness of the sins that may have been previously committed; nor any exception as to the measure of depravity which may have defiled the soul, or the degree of obduracy to which it may have attained. "Though our sins may have been as scarlet, or of a crimson dye—they shall all be washed away in the blood of Christ, and the soul become white as the driven snow! [Isaiah 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 1.18)." "Clean water also shall be sprinkled on us, even the Holy Spirit in his sanctifying operations, to cleanse us from all our filthiness and from all our impurity. A new heart shall be given us, and a new spirit be put within us: and God, by the mighty working of his own power, will cause us "to walk in his judgments and to keep his statutes! [Ezekiel 36:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 36.25-27)."

Here is all that the penitent can desire. The promises are perfectly commensurate with his necessities: and, "laying hold on these promises, he shall be able 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/esv/2 Cor 7.1)."

***~~2. For this, those very perfections of the Deity which are most adverse to them, are pledged—~~***

If the penitent desires mercy, Justice frowns upon him, and demands judgment against him: and Truth requires, that all the threatenings which have been denounced against sin and sinners would be executed upon him. But, through the mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ, these perfections of the Deity are not only satisfied, but are converted into friends, yes, and made the strongest advocates for the penitent's salvation. What a wonderful declaration is this, that, "if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness!"

That mercy would be displayed in forgiveness, we can easily imagine: but how can justice? and how can truth? when, as has been before observed, both these attributes demand the sinner's condemnation? The Gospel solves this difficulty: it declares to us, that the Lord Jesus Christ has undertaken for us, and become our Surety, and by his own obedience unto death has satisfied all the demands of law and justice, and obtained for us the promise of eternal life: so that, if only we believe in him, and come to God through him, we may plead, even upon the very ground of justice and of truth, that God will fulfill to us all that he has promised to the Lord Jesus in our behalf, and impart to us all the blessings which his only dear Son has purchased for us. Through this mysterious imputation, the very righteousness of God is magnified in the exercise of mercy; and "God is just, while justifying the sinner who believes in Jesus, [Romans 3:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 3.26)."

How blessed is the condition of the penitent when viewed in this light! Everything is secured to him that his necessities require! and everything confirmed to him by the very justice and faithfulness of Jehovah! Wipe away your tears, O weeping penitent; and "put off your sackcloth, and gird you with gladness:" for God has here "given you the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness!"

***~~Attend however to a few words of parting advice—~~***

***~~1. Let your humiliation be deep and abiding—~~***

It can never be too deep: there is no measure of self-loathing or self-abhorrence that can exceed what the occasion calls for. You may heretofore have thought yourself so pure, that "you had no sin" which could subject you to the wrath of God. Now you know, that "the bed was too short for you to stretch yourself upon, and the covering too narrow for you to wrap yourself in, [Isaiah 28:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 28.20)." "The pillows are plucked from your arms;" and "the untempered mortar with which you daub your wall, adheres no longer, [Ezekiel 13:10-20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 13.10-20)."

You have now learned to estimate your character by another standard. You see now your defects. You compare your obedience, not with the mere letter, but with the spirit of the law: and from this view of your past life you know your just desert, and are convinced that the very best *action*, *word*, or *thought*of your whole life, if tried by the standard of God's holy law, would plunge you into merited and everlasting perdition! And so it is at this very moment, notwithstanding your change of character. You could no more bear the scrutiny of that perfect law, than you could in your days of unregeneracy. Let this thought never be forgotten: let it abide with you day and night.

Job, before that God had appeared unto him, said, "If I justify myself, my own mouth shall condemn me! [Job 9:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 9.20);" and after he had beheld God in his majesty and glory—his humiliation, so far from being removed, was deepened: and he exclaimed, "Behold, I am vile! I repent therefore, and abhor myself in dust and ashes! [Job 40:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 40.4); [Job 42:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 42.6)." So let your increase both in grace and peace be marked by a proportionable increase in humiliation and contrition.

***~~2. Let your trust in God be simple and uniform—~~***

Never for a moment entertain a thought of any worthiness in yourself, or suffer anything to be blended with your faith in Christ. *Rely on him as entirely as if your whole life had been a scene of the most enormous wickedness.*Renounce entirely everything of your own in point of dependence; and seek to "be found in Christ, not having your own righteousness, but the righteousness which is of God through faith in him." And let this abide with you to your last hour.

*Let neither a relapse into sin deter you from coming thus to Christ; nor the most spotless continuance in holiness render such coming to Christ unnecessary in your eyes*.

***~~This is the way in which you may come, however aggravated may have been your guilt!~~***

*And this is the way in which you must come, however eminent may have been your attainments!*

It is not possible for you to be too much on your guard against either doubting the sufficiency of Christ to save you, or attempting to unite anything with him as a joint ground of your hope. To err in either of these respects will be fatal: it will arm both justice and truth against you, and will make void all that the Lord Jesus has done and suffered for you. But rely simply and altogether upon him, and "you shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end."

***~~#2433~~***

***~~THE ADVOCACY AND ATONEMENT OF CHRIST~~***

***~~[1 John 2:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 2.1-2)~~***

"My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."

There are two extremes to which men are apt to incline, namely, *presumption*and *despair*; and against both of these the Gospel is designed to guard us.

*The ungodly world at large presume that God will never execute his threatened judgments; and some will take occasion even from the Gospel itself to expect impunity in the ways of sin.*But the rich promises of the Gospel were never given for this end: it was never God's design that his "grace would be turned into a license for sin;" and therefore the Apostle affectionately warns us against such an abuse of it, "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin."

On the other hand, there are some persons, who, from a sense of their manifold backslidings, are ready to despond. To these the Apostle proceeds to speak: he sets before them the offices which Christ sustains on the behalf of sinners; and encourages them under every fresh contracted guilt to look unto him as a willing, suitable, and all-sufficient Savior.

To further this good work in your hearts, we will show,

***~~I. The offices of Christ—~~***

It will be proper to notice first that which is last mentioned in the text:

***~~He is the true believer's "Atoning sacrifice for sin"—~~***

To understand what is meant by this, we would consider the state of man. We were fallen creatures, and, in consequence of our fall, liable to the wrath of God. To restore ourselves to the Divine favor was impossible, because we could not offer any atonement for the sins we had committed. God, though ready to forgive, could not exercise mercy towards us in any way which did not accord with his justice, holiness, and truth.

Christ therefore undertook to make satisfaction to the Divine justice, so that "mercy and truth might meet together, and righteousness and peace might kiss each other." This he did by substituting himself in our place. "He bore our sins in his own body on the tree, [1 Peter 2:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Pet 2.24)," and "suffered, the just for the unjust, [1 Peter 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Pet 3.18)."

Our apprehension of this matter will be greatly assisted, if we consider how it was represented under the Mosaic economy. Bullocks, goats, and lambs were offered in sacrifice to God. The offender, when he brought his sacrifice, laid his hands upon its head, and transferred to it his guilt; and then it was put to death in his stead. This sacrifice God accepted on behalf of the offerer, and, out of respect to it, forgave his iniquities, [Leviticus 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lev 1.2); [Leviticus 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lev 1.4). This indeed was only a *type*—but it shadowed forth what was really done by Christ, who "came to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, [Hebrews 9:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 9.26)." The whole language of Scripture accords with this explanation, and confirms the truth of this stupendous mystery, [Ephesians 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 5.2). [Romans 3:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 3.25). In this latter passage, as also in the text, the word which we translate "atoning sacrifice," is the same as is elsewhere translated, "mercy-seat." Compare [Hebrews 9:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 9.5). But the illustration above given, is that which the scope of the passage evidently requires; and to explain the word in reference to the mercy-seat, would, in this place, only obscure the sense.

***~~He is also the true believer's "Advocate with the Father"—~~***

The office of an advocate is to appear for his client in a court of justice, and to plead his cause. Now this office also the Lord Jesus Christ executes in behalf of his people. He is gone up to the court of Heaven, where "he appears in the presence of God for us, [Job 33:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 33.24)." The Holy Spirit also is our advocate: but there is a very wide difference between the advocacy of Christ, and of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit intercedes in us at the throne of *grace*.

Christ intercedes for us at the throne of *glory*.

The Spirit assists us to pray according to the will of God.

Christ presents those prayers unto the Father, and renders them acceptable in his sight.

Now it was this advocacy of *Christ*which the Apostle had primarily in his view: and what he added respecting him as an atoning sacrifice for sin, was a subordinate subject, introduced to show the ground of his intercession, and the reason of its efficacy. It will be proper therefore to notice more particularly the connection between these offices, and the dependence of the one upon the other.

If we could conceive that Jesus had undertaken to be our advocate, and yet had made no atonement for sin, his advocacy would have been altogether in vain: for, what plea could he have found? He could not have denied, or extenuated, our guilt: nor could he have promised that we would ever make compensation for what we had done amiss. His mouth therefore must have been shut as well as ours.

But having offered himself a sacrifice for our sins, he has an adequate and effectual plea for all who trust in him. Are they accused by their great adversary? Yes. Does God himself testify against them? "True, Jesus will say, they are sinners, that deserve your wrathful indignation: but behold the wounds in my hands, my feet, my side; these I endured for them; by these I expiated their guilt. Yes, I gave my own life a ransom for them; and therefore deliver them from going down into the pit! I have satisfied the demands both of law and justice on their behalf, and on this account I look, not to your mercy only, but to your justice and your faithfulness to forgive them, [1 John 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 1.9). Out of respect to me, "you may be just, and yet the justifier of all them that believe, [Romans 3:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 3.26)."

This view of his offices will naturally lead us to consider,

***~~II. The comfort to be derived from them under every fresh-contracted guilt—~~***

That we may speak more perspicuously on this subject, we shall notice:

***~~1. The feelings which a view of those offices will produce—~~***

Hope, joy, and peace—arise in succession to crown the exercise of faith. Until we are enabled to behold the crucified and exalted Savior, we droop, and question the possibility of our acceptance with God. But when we are enabled to believe in him, our *fears*are dissipated; our *sorrows*are turned into joy and exultation; and, after a season, the livelier motion of our affections, which was occasioned by the greatness and suddenness of the change, subsides into a solid and abiding peace. This is the order marked out both by Prophets, [Isaiah 55:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 55.12), and Apostles, [Romans 15:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 15.13), and experienced by all who live by faith in the Son of God.

***~~2. The suitableness of those offices to produce them—~~***

The intercessions of sinful men have often availed for the benefit of those for whom they were offered: but Christ is a "righteous" advocate, who, having no sins of his own to obstruct his access to God, may come with boldness into his presence, and with a certainty of acceptance. Besides, he is ever "with the Father," ready to offer his intercessions the very moment that he sees any danger of a breach between him and us.

Moreover he is the "Christ," whom the Father anointed to this very office. It was the duty of the high-priest, not only to offer sacrifice, but to carry the blood of the sacrifice within the veil, and to burn incense before the mercy-seat: thus the office of intercession belongs to Jesus no less than that of offering a sin-atoning sacrifice: and consequently we have in his appointment to this office, a pledge that he shall not intercede in vain.

The consolations arising from this office are heightened and confirmed by the consideration of his atonement: for in his one offering of himself, there is a sufficiency of merit to justify all that shall believe in him. His death was an atoning sacrifice, not for the sins of a few only, "but for the sins of the world;" so that if all the sins that ever were committed from the foundation of the world, or ever shall be committed as long as the world shall stand, had been committed by any single individual, he would have no reason to despair; since if only he believed in Jesus, they would all be blotted out even as a morning cloud!

What marvelous truths are these! What a foundation for hope, and joy, and peace! O that our meditations on them might be sweet, and that our souls might ever experience their refreshing influence!

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. The self-righteous—~~***

What ground is here afforded for looking to our own repentances or reformations, as though they could restore us to the Divine favor? We deny not the necessity or importance of these things; but we utterly deny their efficacy to save the soul. There is no Savior but Christ: if any man sins, however exemplary he may have been on the whole, he must trust in the atonement and intercession of Christ. There is no distinction between one sinner and another: all must equally depend on Christ: all must enter at that door, [John 10:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 10.9); all must build on that foundation, 1 Corinthians 3:11; all must be saved by the name of Christ, and by that alone! [Acts 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 4.12).

***~~2. The contrite—~~***

Let not the greatness of your guilt dismay you. Remember Abraham's intercession for the cities of the plain, [Genesis 18:23-32](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 18.23-32), and that of Moses for the Israelites, when God forbad him, as it were, to pray for them, [Exodus 32:9-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 32.9-14). Yet neither Abraham nor Moses had redeemed their souls. But Jesus is our atoning sacrifice, as well as our advocate; and shall not He prevail? See how he prevailed for Peter, who, if the Savior had not interceded for him, would most probably have hanged himself in despair, as Judas did. But Christ said, "I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not," and in answer to this prayer, Peter was restored both to his apostleship and to the favor of his God.

Thus effectual shall the Savior's intercession be for you. Consider in what manner he intercedes for you: when he prayed for himself in his extremity, he said, "Father, not as I will, but as you will!" But in his intercession for you he says, "Father, I will that they whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory." Doubt not then, but that he "will pray the Father for you;" and that the Father, who has for so many thousands of years had respect to the rainbow in the clouds, and has forborne to deluge the earth again, will much more have respect to the Son of his love, and fulfill to your soul the promises of his grace!

***~~#2434~~***

***~~THE TRUE TEST OF LOVE TO GOD~~***

**[1 John 2:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 2.3-5)**

"We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him"

There are many who imagine, that to enforce an observance of God's commandments, and to insist on obedience as an evidence of our faith, is legalistic. But the whole tenor of the Gospel shows that saving faith must be productive of holiness, since "faith without works is dead." In fact, there is no certain test whereby to try our faith in Christ, but our obedience to his commands. Of this the Apostle testifies plainly in my text: from whence I shall take occasion to show,

***~~I. That it is the Christian's privilege to be fully assured of his acceptance with God—~~***

The generality of persons conceive this to be impossible; and account the very idea to be presumptuous in the extreme. I will readily grant that there are many who deceive themselves in relation to this matter: but still I cannot admit, that the unfounded confidence of hypocrites is any just ground for concluding that the upright may not know their state before God. Those who deceive themselves do not judge by a right test; and therefore it is that they are deceived: only let any one apply to himself the test which is prescribed in my text, and he need not fear but that the trial shall outcome in a clear discovery of his true spiritual state.

***~~The whole of Scripture attest that men may "know" their acceptance with God—~~***

In the Old Testament, David confidently asserts, "O God, you are my God, [Psalm 63:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 63.1)." And the Bride, in the book of Canticles, with equal assurance, exclaims, "My beloved is mine; and I am his! Song of Solomon 2:16."

Under the New-Testament dispensation this privilege is yet more extensively enjoyed. John, writing to the whole Christian Church, says, in the third chapter of this epistle, "We know that we have passed from death unto life." "We know that we are of the truth, and may assure our hearts before him." "We know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us, [1 John 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 3.14); [1 John 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 3.19); [1 John 3:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 3.24)."

In the fourth chapter he renews the same subject; saying, "We know that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit, [1 John 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 4.13)." And in the last chapter he asserts the same, in a direct contrast with all the world besides: "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in wickedness. We know that the Son of God has come, and has given us an understanding, that we may know him who is true: and we are in him who is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ, [1 John 5:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 5.19-20)."

Nor is there a real Christian in the universe who is not entitled to say with Paul, "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/esv/Gal 2.20)."

***~~The enjoyment of this privilege is at the root of all the believer's comfort—~~***

It is in order to the Christian's enjoyment of this assurance, that the Holy Spirit is given to him as "a Spirit of adoption, that he may cry to God, *Abba, Father!"* and as "a witness to assure his conscience that he is a child of God, [Romans 8:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.15-16)." And it is altogether owing to this internal persuasion of his acceptance with God, that the believer can look forward with confidence to his future state in glory: "Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in Heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked, [2 Corinthians 5:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 5.1-3)."

It is under the same conviction, also, that the Christian, even now in the midst of all his conflicts, is enabled to triumph over all his enemies; assured that none of them, nor all together, "shall ever separate him from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord! [Romans 8:34-39](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.34-39)."

Of course, you will all be anxious to know,

***~~II. How this assurance is to be obtained—~~***

It is not the fruit of any enthusiastic impression or conceit.

I do not deny, but that many "profess that they know God, while in works they deny him, [Titus 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Titus 1.16);" and that *it is possible for men so to deceive themselves, as to possess all the confidence of the most established believer*: yes, there are multitudes who carry this delusion with them even to the bar of judgment; and, even in the presence of their Judge, will claim his favor; saying, "Have we not prophesied in your name, and in your name done many wonderful works?" while they will only draw upon themselves that damnatory sentence, "Depart from me; I never knew you, you workers of iniquity! [Matthew 7:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 7.22-23)." If any would attain a scriptural assurance, they must try themselves by the test proposed to them by John—the test of their obedience to God's commands.

***~~This is a suitable way of attaining it—~~***

*How do we judge of a tree, but by its fruits?*We would not be satisfied with beholding its foliage, however luxuriant it might be: we would desire to behold and to taste the fruit: and by that we would form our estimate of its real worth.

In like manner, if a child or servant professed pre-eminent regard for us, we would naturally expect that regard to manifest itself by an observance of our commands. This, then, is the way by which God will judge of us, and by which we also must judge ourselves. Our Lord has plainly told us, "He who has my commandments, and keeps them, he it is who loves me, [John 14:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 14.21);" and again, "He who abides in me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit, [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 15.5)."

Well, therefore, may our Lord accuse us of inconsistency, when we profess ourselves to be his, without obeying his commandments: "Why do you call me, *Lord, Lord*, and do not the things which I say, [Luke 6:46](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 6.46)." We may set this down as an unquestionable truth, that if "Christ be made unto us righteousness, he will be to us sanctification also, 1 Corinthians 1:30." And if we say, "There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus," we must never forget the description there given of those persons; namely, that "they do not walk after the flesh, but after the Spirit, [Romans 8:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.1)."

***~~It is also a certain way of attaining it—~~***

From whence is it that any person is enabled to keep God's commandments? Our blessed Lord has told us that "without him we can do nothing." It is by its union with the vine, that a branch bears its fruit. Just so, it is only by union with the Lord Jesus that we can bring forth fruit, [John 15:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 15.4). Have we then a clear evidence that we are bringing forth fruit to God? If so, it is manifest that we are savingly united to Christ. Or, as my text expresses it, "Hereby do we know that we are in him." From hence, also, we know that we are in favor with God: for, to what end has God loved us, and shed abroad his love in our hearts, but that we might "by that love be constrained to live unto Him who died for us, [2 Corinthians 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 5.14)." It is by our obedience that God's love is perfected in us;" for by that obedience its end is answered, its power is evinced, its operation is augmented. So that, as "by works our faith is made perfect [James 2:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James 2.22)," so, by works, God's love to us, and ours to him, are also perfected.

I add yet further, that by obedience our right to Heaven is ascertained; for it is written, "Blessed are they that obey his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates of the city, [Revelation 22:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 22.14). Of course, it is not on the ground of merit that they acquire this right, but solely on the ground of God's gracious promises to those who believe in Christ. Nevertheless, this *evidence*is indispensably necessary to the believer; and on the production of that shall his title to Heaven be acknowledged, [Matthew 7:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 7.21); for "Christ is the author of eternal salvation to all who *obey*him, [Hebrews 5:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 5.9)."

***~~Who does not see, in this subject,~~***

***~~1. The importance of self-examination!~~***

It is evidently taken for granted, in my text, that some self-deceivers will be found, who will "say, that they know Christ, while yet they keep not his commandments." And what shall I say to them? What can I say more, than what God himself speaks to them in my text, "That they are liars; and that the truth is not in them?" I grant that this sounds harsh; but it is the declaration of our God; and I dare not to soften or conceal what he has spoken. In many other passages does this loving Apostle use the same language, [1 John 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 1.6); [1 John 4:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 4.20); [1 John 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 5.10); and I entreat you, brethren, to lay it to heart. Be assured, that, while you continue under this delusion, "the truth is not in you," the Gospel has not yet wrought effectually on your hearts, nor are you possessed of real integrity in your souls. No, indeed, you are "liars" and hypocrites, and must take your portion with such characters in Hell! Tell me, then, whether it do not befit you to "examine yourselves," and to try your faith, [Job 20:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 20.4-7), by this standard?

Do not imagine that the knowledge here spoken of is a *mere speculative acquaintance with divine truth*. No! It is such a knowledge as both justifies, [Isaiah 53:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 53.11); and sanctifies, [John 17:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 17.17), the soul. It is that knowledge in comparison with which Paul "accounted all things as dung and dross, [Philippians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 3.8)." This is the knowledge which you must possess, if you will enter Heaven at last. If you will think you have it, while your life and conduct give the lie to your profession, your doom is fixed: for thus says God, by the Prophet Hosea: "Israel pleads with me, 'Help us, for you are our God!' But it is too late. The people of Israel have rejected what is good, and now their enemies will pursue them! [Hosea 8:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 8.2-3)." Yes, "when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might! [2 Thessalonians 1:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Thess 1.7-9)." I say, then, to every one of you, "Examine whether you be in the faith, and prove your own selves [2 Corinthians 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 13.5)."

***~~2. The blessedness of practical Christianity!~~***

To what a glorious state does true religion raise us! Men in all ages have accounted the Virgin Mother of our Lord blessed, because she was God's chosen vessel, to bring into the world the Lord of Glory. But I speak not too strongly, if I say, that the practical Christian is yet more highly honored, and more truly blessed than she, so far as her external relation to him was concerned: for our Lord, in answer to one who had congratulated her on her distinguished honors, saying, "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you," replied, "Yes, rather, blessed are they that hear the Word of God, and keep it [Luke 8:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 8.20-21); [Luke 11:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 11.27-28)."

True, indeed, such persons may not always possess a full assurance of their interest in Christ. God may, for wise reasons, permit their minds to be agitated with doubts and fears; and Satan may, for a season, greatly harass and distress them. But, while they walk in darkness, the Lord will be a light unto them. Yes, he has authorized his servants to address them in these encouraging words: "Who among you fears the Lord, who obeys the voice of his servant, who walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God! [Isaiah 50:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 50.10). Yes, brethren, if only you are conscientiously endeavoring to approve yourselves to God in a holy and unreserved obedience, you need not fear. This very disposition emanates from God: it is itself a fruit and evidence of his love; and it shall assuredly outcome in everlasting felicity! For, as sure as God is true, "light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart, [Psalm 97:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 97.11)."

***~~#2435~~***

***~~CHRIST AN EXAMPLE TO HIS FOLLOWERS~~***

***~~[1 John 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 2.6)~~***

"Whoever claims to live in him, must walk as Jesus did."

Among the various excellencies which distinguish Christianity from all other religions, one of very considerable importance is, that the Author of it condescended to exemplify in his own person everything which it required of its most faithful adherents.

Different philosophers established rules for their followers: but no one ever professed himself a pattern, and much less a perfect pattern, of all that under any circumstances could be required of him. But the Lord Jesus Christ has perfectly fulfilled his own law, as for other ends, so also that he might "set an example for us to follow his steps." It is indeed true that He is the sole Author of our salvation from first to last: but he does not on that account dispense with our obedience to his Word. On the contrary, he says, that "Whoever claims to live in him, must walk as Jesus did."

There are some who deny that the Word is to the believer a rule of life. But supposing this error could not be refuted by direct testimony, which it easily and abundantly may, what would the advocates of it gain, if once they admitted, what I suppose no man would deny, that Christ is an example for us to follow? Did not he "fulfill all righteousness," even to the utmost extent of the moral law? And if he did, and is an example to us, then must not we obey the law in the same manner, and to the same extent? We are not indeed to fulfill it for the same ends; because he alone, as the Mediator between God and man, can save men by his obedience unto death: but in all that he did as a man, we are to follow his steps: and if we neglect to do so, we show, that we have no part or lot in his salvation.

The words I have read will lead me to set before you the *principles*, and the *practice*, of every true Christian.

***~~I. The principles of every true Christian—~~***

The Christian is united unto Christ by faith, as a branch to the vine; and his one great concern is to "abide in Christ."

***~~For this he labors as the one ground of his hope—~~***

He knows that he has nothing, and can have nothing, in himself. He needs no one to tell him this: he has learned it, as from the inspired volume, so also from his own experience. He has found on numberless occasions how weak and sinful a creature he is: and is well assured, that, if he had not "Jehovah himself for his righteousness and strength," then it would be impossible for him ever to be saved. Hence he views with delight the Lord Jesus Christ as the great Head of the Church. "It has pleased the Father, that in Christ would all fullness dwell, [Colossians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 1.19);" and in this respect he is altogether like-minded with the Father: for it pleases him in his inmost soul to have such a Head of vital influence, and such a Depository of all spiritual blessings, as the Lord Jesus. He is sensible that the branch derives all its life and fertility from its union with the vine: and that, if once separated from the vine, it would wither and die, [John 15:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 15.1-5).

This idea he endeavors to realize: and "the life which he lives in the flesh, he lives altogether by faith in the Son of God, [Galatians 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 2.21)," "receiving out of his fullness, [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.16)," a constant supply of grace and peace.

If, as a blind and ignorant creature, he needs wisdom;  
or as a guilty creature, he needs righteousness;  
or as a polluted creature, he needs sanctification;  
or as an enslaved creature, he needs redemption:  
he looks for it all in Christ, whom he regards as furnished with all for the use of his Church, and as empowered to communicate it all to every one that trusts in him! [1 Corinthians 1:30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 1.30).

***~~In this he glories as his most exalted privilege—~~***

Humiliating as this *life of dependence upon Christ*at first sight appears, he considers it as his highest honor, and as raising him even above Adam in Paradise. Adam, when in Paradise, was indeed perfect: but to him was committed the task of working out a righteousness for himself, and of maintaining by his own inherent powers his steadfastness in the divine life. And hence he fell, and died, and involved both himself and all his posterity in ruin.

But the believer has a righteousness wrought out for him by his incarnate God; and "his life," instead of being committed to his own keeping, "is hidden with Christ in God," where Satan cannot reach it; and therefore, since Christ has engaged that none shall ever pluck out of his hands those whom the Father has committed to him, he shall endure unto the end: and, "when Christ, who is his life, shall appear, shall assuredly appear with him in glory! [Colossians 3:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 3.3-4)." Thus, in respect both of honor and security, the believer is elevated even above Adam himself; since he has not a creature-righteousness wherein to stand before God, or a created power to uphold him; but a righteousness that is divine, and an arm that is omnipotent.

To form a right judgment of his state, we must attend to what our blessed Lord himself has spoken on this subject. Indeed his words are so strong, that no man would dare to utter them if not warranted by his authority. What would you say, if I were to affirm that the life of faith resembles the very life which the Lord Jesus Christ lived when on earth; and that the believer has the same dependence on the Lord Jesus Christ, as Christ himself, during his incarnate state, had on the Father; and the same security in him too. Would you not be almost ready to shut your ears, and to accuse the preacher of blasphemy? Yet this is what we are authorized by Christ himself to declare. Hear his own words: "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me, [John 6:56-57](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 6.56-57)." Say, beloved, is not here a ground of glorying? and, if the believer did not glory in this privilege, would not the very stones cry out against him?

While with confidence we affirm these to be the Christian's principles, we with no less confidence proceed to declare,

***~~II. The practice of every true Christian—~~***

It is thought by many that a life of faith is unfriendly to morality; since if all our righteousness is in Him, what need have we of any of our own? And, if he is engaged to keep us, what need have we of any care or watchfulness to keep ourselves? But this reasoning is altogether fallacious: since every one who by faith abides in Christ, acknowledges it his bounden duty to "walk as he walked."

***~~He acknowledges it, I say, as his bounden duty—~~***

He does not conceive of Christ as liberating him from the obligations of morality: for though he is free from the law as a covenant, he is not free from it, nor would wish to be freed from it, as a rule of life. He considers himself as "not without law, but under the law to Christ." Were he permitted to violate the commands of God, he would account it a curse rather than a privilege. Such a liberty would appear to him only like a permission to drink poison, which, however sweet to the taste, would prove "the gall of asps within him."

So far from imagining himself freed from the restraints of the law, he considers all that Christ has done for him as laying him under ten-fold obligations to holiness both of heart and life. His *motives*to obedience are changed indeed: but his *obligations*to it are not a whit diminished, yes, rather, are greatly heightened; because he well knows that the very end for which his Savior died was to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous for good works!"

***~~He makes it his constant and determined aim—~~***

The true believer is not a mere *follower*of Christ, but an *imitator*also [1 Corinthians 11:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 11.1), and it is his delight to set the Savior before him as his great Exemplar. When he sees how entirely the soul of Jesus was wrapped up in his work, and that it was "his food and drink to do his Father's will," he pants, and sighs, and with shame and sorrow of heart exclaims, O that there were in me the mind that was in Christ Jesus!

When he beholds the ardor of Christ's love to himself, his unwearied labors, his patient sufferings, his exertions in every possible way, he girds up his loins, and follows the footsteps of his Lord; and though he knows that he can never attain to his perfection—yet he proposes to himself no object short of that, and strives to be "holy as he was holy," and "perfect as he was perfect."

Nor does the glory of Heaven itself appear more desirable in his eyes, than does a conformity to the Savior's image in righteousness and true holiness.

In a peculiar manner, he notices the virtues of his Divine Master; his meekness, his patience, his forbearance, his love to enemies, his compassion even to his very murderers. He sees what a fallen creature he himself is, and he cries mightily to God for grace and strength, that he may be enabled to mortify every feeling that is opposite to love, and to "purify himself even as his Lord and Master was pure, [1 John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 3.3)."

***~~Now as this subject gives us a deep insight into the whole of the Gospel system, I will embrace this opportunity,~~***

**1.** Of establishing the principles of those who are in doubt—

The Christian world has been much divided on the subject of faith and works: and we may easily conceive that some, who are well affected towards the Gospel, may feel a doubt, whether in our statements of the truth we do not elevate faith too high, and sink morality below its proper level. But the text, I conceive, will settle this point at once.

I grant, that those who require good works in whole or in part to justify us before God, do in appearance show a high sense of their value: and that those who decry them in this point of view, and declare that such a dependence on them will invalidate the whole Gospel, and sink us into perdition—do in appearance betray an indifference towards them. But I would ask, Does any advocate for the merit of good works ever propose to himself so high a standard as that in my text? and, if any one inculcate the necessity of walking to the very uttermost as Christ walked, do they not account him "righteous overmuch?" Yes assuredly, they always have a lower standard than that which is proposed to them in the Gospel.

On the other hand, those who exalt the Lord Jesus Christ, and live by faith in him, will admit of no rule of conduct which does not embrace the whole law, and lead to a perfect conformity to the Lord Jesus Christ. And hence it is, that the followers of Christ are as much condemned for their unnecessary zeal and strictness, as for the supposed licentiousness of their principles.

Here then the point is brought to the very test which the advocates of *human merit*profess to approve. Let the two opposite systems be tried by this touchstone; 'Which requires of its votaries the sublimer and more enlarged morality?' and we consent, that this issue, fairly tried, shall determine the point forever.

Those who live in any measure of self-righteousness and self-sufficiency, will walk as the world walks.

Those who abide in Christ as their only hope, will with all their might endeavor to walk as Christ walked!

***~~2. Of directing the energies of those who have embraced the Gospel—~~***

Be not faint or weary in well-doing: but set the Lord ever before you, and endeavor to resemble him in the whole "spirit of his mind," and the whole course of his conduct. Of course, what he spoke as the Great Prophet of the Church, or did as the Redeemer of the world, was peculiar to himself, and can be no pattern for us. But in all that he either spoke or did as perfect man, we are to follow him without reserve. If we propose to ourselves any lower standard, or except any one of God's commandments from our rule of duty—then we are not Christ's disciples. See what is said in our text, " Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did." And again in the following chapter: "No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him, 1 [John 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 3.6). "We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him! [1 John 2:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 2.3-4)."

Here then you see what all your profession of faith will amount to, if it does not approve itself by its fruits: it will be a self-delusion, and a lie altogether! Come then, beloved, and address yourselves to your high and heavenly work. You see your calling: O strive to "walk worthy of it!" yes, "worthy of the Lord," whose you are, and whom you profess to serve! Thus will you vindicate the Gospel from the charges which ignorant and ungodly men bring against it; and will prove to all around you that it is indeed "the wisdom of God, and the power of God unto salvation."

***~~#2436~~***

***~~THE TRUE LIGHT~~***

***~~[1 John 2:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 2.7-8)~~***

"Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and you, because the darkness is past, and the true light now shines."

Our blessed Lord is supposed by many to have enlarged the demands of the moral law. That he speaks of giving a new commandment is certain: "A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another: as I have loved you, that you also love one another, [John 13:34](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 13.34)." John also speaks to the same effect in the words before my text; though, in the words immediately preceding, he had declared, that it was not a new commandment. The reconciling of this difficulty will suggest the true explanation of our text.

The command given us to love our neighbor as ourselves, was not a new commandment. It was a part of the moral law [Leviticus 19:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lev 19.18); and of the law originally written on the heart of man in Paradise. Yet in some respects it was a new law: both as it respected the Lord Jesus who enacted it, and as it respected us on whom it was enjoined. Let us hear what the Apostle himself says: "Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and you."

It was new as it respected the Lord Jesus Christ, who had proposed his own conduct as the model (which, of course, it could not be, until he himself had completed his work on earth), and had enforced it with his own authority as Mediator, which also must be subsequent to his entrance on the mediatorial office.

It was new also as it respected us, because it was never before conceived to extend to the "laying down of our lives for the brethren [1 John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 3.16)," and because it was enjoined with new motives, such as could never have existed before, even the testifying of our love to Christ, "who has loved us, and given himself for us."

Previous to the coming of our Lord, a veil of obscurity hung over these things: but now they were made clear, "because the darkness was past, and the true light now shined."

In considering the change which is here spoken of, I shall notice it,

***~~I. As verified at that day—~~***

***~~The darkness of the Mosaic dispensation was then dispelled—~~***

That was a dark and shadowy dispensation altogether. God himself was not made known by it as the common Father of all, but as the friend only of one peculiar people, whom he favored above all others. The way of acceptance with him was very indistinctly seen in the sacrifices which were offered; there being but little spoken to direct the attention of the offerers to that great Sacrifice, from whence alone they derived all their efficacy.

Nor were the requirements of the moral law by any means clearly revealed; the very commandments themselves consisting only of prohibitions, and those prohibitions extending, for the most part, only to overt acts. Hence Paul himself, educated as he was by the first master of his day, and pre-eminently conversant as he was with the Mosaic writings, did not, until his eyes were opened by the Spirit of God, understand the spiritual import of the law, or the extent of the command, "You shall not covet, [Romans 7:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 7.7); [Romans 7:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 7.9)." Besides, there were many enactments for the direction of magistrates in the administration of justice, which, when erroneously construed as rules of duty in private life, seemed to authorize revenge; as, "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth."

But our blessed Lord threw the true light on the whole of that economy. He declared plainly, that he was "come to fulfill the law," and "to give his life a ransom for many." He directed the people to look to him as "the way, by which alone anyone could come to the Father; as the truth," in whom all the types and shadows of the law were realized; and "as the life," by whom alone any sinner in the universe could live, [John 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 14.6). He explained also the *moral law*, and freed it from all the glosses of the Scribes and Pharisees, by which it had been obscured; declaring, that it *extended to the thoughts and desires of the heart, no less than to the overt act*. In particular he made known the great duty of love, as comprehending the whole law in all its branches, and in its utmost extent. Thus in relation both to doctrine and morals it might be truly said, that "the darkness was past, and the true light then shined."

***~~The darkness was also dispelled from their minds—~~***

All by nature are in darkness; and, even though the light shines around them, they are not able to apprehend it, "the eyes of their understanding being altogether darkened." Of all while in a state of unbelief, it is expressly said, that "the god of this world has blinded their eyes, [2 Corinthians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 4.4)." But by the Gospel, accompanied with power from on high, they had been "turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God, [Acts 26:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 26.18)." They now acknowledged Jesus as their Savior; and had obtained "reconciliation with God through the blood of his cross." They had now an insight into that stupendous mystery, which all "the angels in Heaven are desiring to look into"—the redemption of the world by the sacrifice of our incarnate God; and, together with that, had acquired just views of the state in which a redeemed sinner ought to live. In a word, they had been "brought out of darkness into marvelous light, [1 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Pet 2.9)." So that they were able to appreciate the necessity and the excellency of the commandment which was now enjoined.

But let us contemplate this glorious change,

***~~II. As fulfilled also among ourselves—~~***

***~~Certainly, the true light does shine among you—~~***

The Lord Jesus "Christ is fully preached among you." His person, his work, his offices are set before you. You have seen from time to time the types, as completed in their great Antitype; and the prophecies, as fulfilled in him to whom they had respect, even "Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph." The covenant of grace, which was made with him in our behalf, has been opened to you, and all the great and precious promises that are contained in it unfolded to your view. Salvation, in all its freeness, and in all its fullness, has been offered to you; and all the perfections of God, as pledged for your encouragement, have been brought in review before you.

The nature of *evangelical obedience* been clearly and fully declared. The distinction between the letter and the spirit of the law has been copiously displayed; and all the high requirements of the Gospel been made known; and not declared only, but enforced also by every species of argument that could address itself to your understanding, your conscience, or your will.

I say not that these things have been so fully manifested as they ought to have been, or might have been: because, if my own views had been more enlarged, and my own soul been more deeply impressed with these things, my ministrations would no doubt have been more luminous and beneficial: but this I can say, that I have "not knowingly withheld anything that could be profitable unto you;" nor, according to the measure of light and grace given unto me, "have I shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God, [Acts 20:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 20.20); [Acts 20:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 20.27)." In this respect therefore I may say, that, if at any time there has been darkness here, that darkness is past: and the true light shines among you, in such a degree, at least, as is sufficient to "guide all your feet into the way of peace."

But can it be said that the darkness is passed away from the souls of all?

Would to God that my text were true in this extent also. Beloved brethren, are not many of you still in the darkness, if not of Judaism itself—yet of the Judaizing teachers, who insisted on combining some obedience of their own with the merits of Christ? Are not the beauty, and glory, and excellency of our holy religion so indistinctly seen by many among you, that it produces scarcely any effect upon your hearts and lives? If we look at morals, are not your views of them also very imperfect?

Read our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, and see whether your heart goes along with it in all that it inculcates respecting patience, forbearance, meekness, forgiveness?

Read Paul's description of love in the 13th chapter of his First Epistle to the Corinthians, and see whether that is the standard at which you aim, and by which you estimate your attainments?

Have you any idea of your duty to your brethren requiring, that, if it may subserve their spiritual and eternal interests, you would lay down your life for them? I will not ask what *speculative*notions you may have of these things; for in that respect your views may be correct enough: but what is *your practice?*It is by *your practice* that your character must be tried: and, when tried by that, say whether you are not found altogether lacking.

That there is great danger of self-deceit in reference to this matter, is clear from what the Apostle says in the very words following my text: "He who says he is in the light and hates his brother, is in darkness even until now. He who loves his brother, abides in the light; and there is no occasion of stumbling in him; but he who hates his brother is in darkness, and walks in darkness, and knows not where he goes, because that darkness has blinded his eyes, verse 11-13."

You perceive that a man may be very confident that he is in the light; and yet be so defective in respect of love, as to be in utter darkness, and going he knows not where. I beg you, guard against so fatal a delusion as this, and never conceive yourselves to be "children of light," until your whole spirit and temper, candidly examined, attest that you are "walking as children of the light, [Ephesians 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 5.8)."

***~~It may be that you would wish to have two questions solved.~~***

With answering them, I will conclude the subject.

***~~1. How shall I obtain the change spoken of in the text?~~***

Many directions I might give you; and all proper in their place: but there is one, which, if it does not supersede all others, will at least prove amply sufficient for this occasion. Our blessed Lord says, "I am the light of the world: he who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life, [John 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 8.12)." Here the direction is from such authority as cannot be withstood, and at the same time so complete, that, if followed, it cannot but succeed. In truth, all other directions, in comparison with this, are like advising persons to light a candle of their own, when they might come forth at once to the noonday sun. By the Lord Jesus Christ the whole darkness, whether from without or from within, shall be dispersed at once.

The nature and perfections of God,  
the spirituality and extent of the law,  
the use of the whole of the Mosaic ritual,  
together with the whole work of redemption  
—will all be made visible as the light itself, to one who obtains just views of Christ. The whole system of morals too will he rendered clear and luminous; and all the sublime motives and encouragements to obedience be reflected with irresistible efficacy upon the soul.

This then I say: Go to the Lord Jesus Christ; follow him; contemplate him; believe in him as having in himself all fullness for the supply of those who trust in him; and you shall soon "be guided into all truth," and experience in the richest abundance the glory and blessedness of his salvation.

***~~2. How shall I improve that change, supposing it to have been wrought within me?~~***

This is a question which every child of light should ask. Speaking to persons who were truly enlightened, the Apostle Paul says, "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, [1 Thessalonians 5:5-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Thess 5.5-8)."

You can easily perceive that a change of *views*would be followed by a corresponding change of *conduct*; and, consequently, that henceforth you would "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them, [Ephesians 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 5.11)." The mercy given to you, has not been given for yourselves alone, but for others also; before whom you ought to "shine as lights in a dark place, [Philippians 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 2.15-16)," yes so to shine, that all who "behold your light may be constrained to glorify your Father who is in Heaven."

***~~#2437~~***

***~~THE DIFFERENT GROWTH AND PRIVILEGES OF GOD'S PEOPLE~~***

**[1 John 2:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 2.12-14)**

"I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.

I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning.

I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one.

I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father.

I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning.

I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one."

The Word of God is intended for every individual of mankind, that all, being acquainted with their own state, may know what God says respecting them. On this account it is the duty of ministers to mark with accuracy the discriminating features of every character, and, by "rightly dividing the word of truth," to "give to every one his portion in due season." John affords us a good example with respect to this: for, not content with "separating the precious from the vile," he arranges the saints themselves into distinct classes, according to their several attainments, and declares to each those peculiar marks wherein they differ from each other.

Our intention is simply to address the several classes of Christians here specified; first drawing their respective characters, and then setting before them their distinctive privileges and attainments.

***~~I. We speak to "you, little children"—~~***

In order to come under this title, it is necessary that you would have been "begotten with the incorruptible seed, the Word of God," and been brought into God's family by the renewing influences of his Spirit. It is not supposed that you have grown to any stature in the family of Christ, but, on the contrary, that you have either recently "come out of darkness into the marvelous light of the Gospel," or, at least, made very little advance in the divine life. You are, however, born again. You have seen your guilt and helplessness; you have fled to Christ for refuge—you have sought for mercy through the blood and righteousness of your incarnate God. You have obtained a new nature: and, though you are yet weak in all your faculties and all your powers, there is no part in you that is wholly unrenewed.

Your *understanding*, though dark, is enlightened with some rays from the Sun of Righteousness. Your *affections*, though far from pure, are yet, on the whole, turned to God, and heavenly things. The *Divine image*, though far from perfect, is, in a measure, formed upon your souls; so that it already appears whose you are, by the resemblance which you bear to your heavenly Father.

Hear then the privileges which belong to you. In the first place, we declare from God himself, that "your sins are forgiven." Whatever they may have been, however numerous, however heinous, (God makes no distinction, nor can we presume to make any,) they are all "blotted out of the book of God's remembrance," nor shall so much as one of them ever appear in judgment against you! From the first moment that you believed in Christ, and became truly regenerate, this was your happy portion—you were not to wait for it until a life of holiness would confirm your title to it. A free and full pardon was yours, the very instant you became a child of God.

But remember for whose sake this pardon has been bestowed upon you. It has not been for your own sake; for you deserved nothing but wrath; yes, if God at this moment were to enter into judgment with you according to your present deserts, you must inevitably perish. God has had respect to his dear Son: and "for his sake" has forgiven you. The pardon you enjoy, was bought with the precious blood of Christ. It is altogether on account of what Christ has done and suffered for you, that you have found acceptance with God. "There is no other name given under Heaven whereby you, or any other sinner, can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ."

Further, it is said of you, that "you have known the Father." Your views of the Gospel are at present very partial, and confused. You merely see that you were sinners before God: and that God, in infinite mercy, sent his only-begotten Son to die for you; and that through the death of Christ you are to obtain mercy. Hence you are emboldened to look unto God as reconciled to you in Christ Jesus; and with a spirit of adoption to cry, *Abba, Father*. Thus, though you see as yet but little of the work and offices of Christ, you know the Father as a just—yet merciful, and gracious God.

***~~II. We would next address "you, young men"—~~***

As in the natural world children grow up to manhood, so in the spiritual world there is a similar progress to maturity. We might proceed to draw the necessary distinctions between your infantile and adult state; but the *privileges*annexed to your state in the words of our text, will serve at the same time to mark the progress which you have made in the divine life; and therefore we shall confine ourselves to them.

You then are declared to be "strong," and in this you differ widely from your former state: for whereas you formerly were liable to be "tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine," and to be overcome by every temptation, you now have obtained a stability both in knowledge and in grace. Not that you are stronger in yourselves than you were formerly; but you have learned how weak you are; and have been led to rely wholly on the Lord Jesus Christ; and "through him have been enabled to do" what, in your self-confident state, you were unable to perform. Hence "you are strong; but it is in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and in the power of his might." Your conscious weakness is the means of your strength. You can say with the Apostle, "when I am weak, then am I strong."

It is characteristic of your state also, that "the Word of God abides in you." When you were children, you knew but little of the Word of God; but you have studied it—you have "desired it, and delighted in it, as unadulterated milk; and by means of it have grown up" to maturity. You have found that there is no weapon so powerful as that. You have learned, not only from the Savior's example, but from your own experience, that one single arrow taken out of that quiver is sufficient to vanquish all the hosts of Hell. Hence you have been led to treasure up the promises in your memory; and to have recourse to the inspired volume for direction and support in every emergency.

Further, it is said, that "you have overcome the wicked one." In your earlier days Satan beguiled and vanquished you in ten thousand instances; but now you have attained the knowledge of his devices. He himself, if we may so speak, has at last taught you how to repel his assaults, and to resist him with success. You are become expert in the spiritual warfare. You know how to wield "the sword of the Spirit." You know when and where to expect your enemy. You know the way in which he manages his assaults. And you have learned to combat him upon your knees. This, though a disadvantageous posture in earthly conflicts, you have found to be the best that can possibly be resorted to in the spiritual warfare. Hence you have had the comfort of seeing that wicked fiend, who assaulted you with the *subtlety of a serpent*, and the *fury of a roaring lion*, flee from your face intimidated and confounded! [James 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James 4.7)."

O remember these your high privileges, and labor continually to walk worthy of them!

***~~III. Lastly, we would speak to you also who are "fathers" in Christ—~~***

As age and experience elevate a man to a higher rank in the community than he possessed while in the vigor of his youth, so it is in the Church of God. Not that age, or even long continuance in the Church of Christ, can entitle a man to the appellation of "father," for some are not born to God until they are far advanced in life; and *others, through carnality or sloth, have made so little progress in religion, that they have need to be treated as babes*, when, for the time that they have professed godliness, they ought to have attained the age and stature of fathers, 1 Corinthians 3:1-2. [Hebrews 5:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 5.12). Those only are deserving of this honorable name, who have maintained a long and successful conflict with the powers of darkness.

Respecting you then it is said, that "you have known him who is from the beginning." Whom he intended to designate under this expression, the Apostle himself tells us: it is Christ, who "was in the beginning with God, and was God. Compare [John 1:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.1) with [1 John 1:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 1.1)."

Now the distinction between you and young men principally consists in this; that by your numerous conflicts you have been compelled to make use of Christ in all his offices, and have thereby attained a more extensive knowledge of . . .  
his love and mercy,  
his power and grace,  
his truth and faithfulness.

From your own experience therefore you can trust in him yourselves, and can exhort others also to trust in him with the most unlimited confidence, and to glory in him as their "all in all."

See then, fathers, that you improve your knowledge for this end: and soon you shall "see him as you are seen, and know him as you are known".

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

***~~1. To those who are included under any of the foregoing titles—~~***

Let the *least*in God's family rejoice in the unspeakable blessings given unto them. But let not the most *advanced*imagine, that they are not yet to proceed to higher attainments.

All must "war a good warfare."

All must seek to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus."

All must "be faithful unto death, if ever they would obtain a crown of life."

***~~2. To those who have never yet been brought into the family of God—~~***

Dearly beloved, the forgiveness of sins is the exclusive privilege of God's children. This is manifestly implied in the address to little children. O then seek to be made new creatures in Christ Jesus! Our Lord tells you repeatedly that "you must be born again," and that, "if you are not, you never can enter into the kingdom of Heaven." Pray then that you may "be born of the Spirit;" and that you may be savingly interested in the Redeemer's death. So shall you be numbered with the children of God, and be made partakers of their inheritance for evermore.

***~~#2438~~***

***~~LOVE OF THE WORLD FORBIDDEN~~***

***~~[1 John 2:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 2.15-17)~~***

"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever!"

*Whatever our attainments may be in the divine life, we still need the voice of warning and exhortation to keep us from the evils to which we are exposed.* As believers, we have been brought out of "a world which lies in wickedness." But still we are encompassed with temptations, and bear about with us a corrupt nature which is ever liable to be ensnared by them. In persons most advanced in the divine life "the flesh lusts against the Spirit, as well as the Spirit against the flesh; so that they cannot do all that they should;" and may be easily seduced to do things, which, according to their better judgment, they would not do.

The Apostle has been addressing the whole Christian Church according to their age and stature in the divine life, under the names of Little Children, Young Men, and Fathers; and now, to the one as well as to the other of these classes, he gives the injunction in our text. Let all classes therefore among you also receive the word as addressed personally to yourselves, while we consider,

***~~I. The injunction here given—~~***

There are few subjects, if any, in the whole course of our ministrations, that require a more careful and gentle discussion than that before us. The solemnity with which it is introduced, and the extraordinary emphasis with which it is impressed on our minds, evince beyond a doubt the great *importance*of it.

At the same time, as if it were of no importance whatever, or there were no danger of erring in relation to it, everyone puts the construction upon it which suits his own habits and inclinations, and takes for granted that his views of it are correct.

But the truth is that there is in this subject a need for the precise discrimination, lest, on the one hand, we make the prohibition more strict than Jehovah himself intended it to be; or, on the other hand, give to it a latitude which is contrary to his mind, and ruinous to all who practically adopt it.

A man who lives in monastic seclusion will be ready to say that this passage forbids all interaction with the world.

At the same time, a person living in an unrestrained commerce with the world, will see in it nothing that condemns the most unrestrained compliance with the maxims and habits of the world, provided they be not palpably and grossly immoral.

In like manner they will differ as widely respecting the *extent*of the prohibition as the *object*of it; the one supposing that every degree of inclination towards the world is forbidden; the other, thinking himself at liberty to "wallow in earthly indulgences as a sow in the mire, [1 Peter 2:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Pet 2.22)." It is obvious therefore that we should enter on this subject with extreme caution; determining with the greatest care,

**1. The IMPORT** **of the prohibition—**

What are we to understand by "the world?" In answer to this question, I would say,it comprehends all the things of time and sense, as standing in opposition to the things which relate to the eternal world. The Apostle Paul suggests to us this very distinction, when he says that we are to "look, not at the things which are seen and are temporal, but at the things which are not seen and eternal, [2 Corinthians 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 4.18)." This will appear more clear, while we consider what is meant by "loving" the world.

We are not to understand by it every degree of attachment to it, but only such a degree as is *inordinate*, and such a degree as puts its object in competition with invisible and eternal realities. Among the things of time and sense must be reckoned a man's fellowship with his own family. Shall we then say, that a man ought to have no pleasure in the society of his own wife and children? Such an absurdity carries its own refutation along with it.

Hence then I take the term, not in a positive, but comparative, sense; and regard it as importing, that we are not to give to any object of time and sense that kind or measure of affection which is due only to things of eternal consequence.

The Apostle's own explanation of his meaning will throw further light on this matter. "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," are very generally understood as importing all those things which administer to sensual gratification; and those things which, when beheld, are apt to fascinate us with their attractions; and those things which men chiefly affect, as elevating them in the estimation of mankind; or, in other words, pleasure, and riches, and honor. And if to these we apply what was before specified as implied in the term "love," we shall be prepared to determine with very considerable accuracy,

***~~2. The EXTENT of the prohibition—~~***

The word "love" comprehends three things; esteem, desire, and delight. And, if we apply it in this extent to the various things above-mentioned, we shall, I think, understand with clearness the Apostle's meaning in our text. Some measure of love, I again say, the things of this world are entitled to. They may be esteemed, as gifts from a gracious God; they may be desired, as means of honoring him, and benefitting our fellow-creatures; and they may be delighted in, as conducive to our comfort, when rightly improved: for "God has given us all things richly to enjoy 1 Timothy 6:17." But,

They are not to be esteemed, as though they possessed any *intrinsic*good. They are all in themselves empty, vain, perishing, and utterly incapable of administering any real comfort to the soul, or even of benefitting us at all, any farther than God shall be pleased to make use of them for that end.

*They are not to be desired so as in the least degree to interfere with our pursuit of higher and better things*. "Our affections are to be set on things above, and not on things on the earth, [Colossians 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 3.2)." The two cannot, and must not, be put in competition with each other. The one, however dear in itself, must be despised and hated in comparison with the other: father, mother, wife, children, yes and our own life also, must be of no account with us, if they at all stand in our way of serving and honoring our God, [Luke 14:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 14.26). His claims are paramount to every other; and there is nothing either in Heaven or on earth to be desired in comparison with him, [Psalm 73:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 73.25).

They are not to be delighted in, as things in which, to whatever extent they were multiplied, we could be satisfied with taking up our rest. Job seems to have had singularly clear and just views of this subject: "If," says he, "I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, You are my confidence. If I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because my hand had gotten much; this were an iniquity to be punished by the judge, for then I would have denied the God that is above [Job 31:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 31.24-25); [Job 31:28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 31.28)." Whoever he is that, on account of his earthly comfort, says, "Soul, take your ease," is justly branded as "a fool," and to all eternity will find occasion to bewail his folly!

With the help of these distinctions I think we may fix, with some precision, the true import of the injunction before us, and may proceed in a satisfactory manner to consider further,

***~~II. The reasons with which it is enforced—~~***

In confirmation of what he says respecting the world, the Apostle declares,

***~~1. That the world is not worthy of our love—~~***

If we look at its nature, how base is it! "It is not of the Father, but of the world." What is there in the whole circle of the world that can boast of a heavenly origin? Nothing, not an atom of it either comes from God, or leads to God, any farther than it is sanctified unto us by the covenant of grace. It is enjoyed by heathen, as well as by Christians; and what does it do for them? Yes, what does it advance the real welfare of the great mass of the professing Christian world? The world altogether arose out of the fall of man. In Paradise, the world was nothing; and God was all. It was not until sin had entered into the world, that the world and its lusts were put in competition with God, or that a love to present things had attained an undue ascendant over the soul. And were man still in his original innocence, all pleasures, riches, and honors would be of no account, any farther than God was enjoyed in them, and they were made subservient to his glory

Again, if we look at its duration, it is altogether transient, "the fashion of this world passes away, and the lust thereof; but he that does the will of God abides for ever." What has the lover of this world of all that he has ever enjoyed? How long will the savor of his present enjoyments abide with him? How long can he secure the continuance of them? and what will remain of them the moment he has departed hence?

On the other hand, if he loves God, and do his will, he has a continual feast: his gratifications never cloy: his bliss will bear reflection, and be renewed by the retrospect. The consciousness that he has a taste for such enjoyments will itself be a source of very sublime happiness; of a happiness which he will possess under the most afflictive circumstances, and which will soothe even the pangs of death itself: and this source of enjoyment, instead of being confined to this present life, will be infinitely enlarged, and afford *inexhaustible supplies of bliss to all eternity*.

Say then, brethren, whether this world is worthy of a Christian's affections? I do not hesitate to say, it is not: for it affords nothing that is capable of satisfying an immortal soul; and the poor gratifications it does afford, are all perishing even while they are in our hands! [Colossians 2:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 2.22).

***~~2. That a love to the world is absolutely INCOMPATIBLE with love to God—~~***

How solemn is the declaration, "If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him?" This, if delivered on man's authority, might be deemed uncharitable; but it is declared on the authority of God himself: and a very little reflection will convince us of the truth of it. Can any man conceive that an *angel*, if sent down from Heaven to sojourn here for a time, would set his affections on things below? No! We are well assured, that he would have far juster views of earthly vanities, than to set his heart upon them: his taste would be too refined for such gross nourishment. He would fulfill the duties that were assigned him, whatever they might be: but his heart would be with God; with God supremely, and with God alone.

Thus then it would be with us: and thus it must be, if we are Christians indeed: for "we cannot serve God and Mammon [Matthew 6:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 6.24);" "the very friendship of the world is enmity with God."

As the will or desire to serve the king's enemies, if it were clearly proved, would constitute us traitors to our king and country, even though we had not succeeded in our efforts, just so the very will and desire to be the friends of the world is itself sufficient to prove and "constitute us enemies of God! [James 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James 4.4).

As the love of God grows in the soul, the love of the world abates. And, as the love of the world revives, the love of God decays. The two are as opposite to each other as light and darkness; and neither can prevail but by the expulsion of the other.

Again then I ask, is not here abundant reason for the injunction in my text? If the love of God and of the world could exist together, there would be some reason for harboring both. But as they are in direct and unalterable opposition to each other, we cannot but unite with the Apostle in this beneficial admonition, "Do not love the world!"

***~~While, however, I cordially unite in this sentiment, I would add,~~***

***~~1. Be careful in passing judgment upon others—~~***

There is scarcely any subject on which men are so prone to exercise a censorious disposition as this. They are ready to make their own habits, or at all events their own views, a standard for others: and the more strict any persons are in relation to themselves, the more apt they are to pass an uncharitable judgment upon others.

But we are not capable of judging rightly for others, unless we can put ourselves exactly into their situation. A person in lower life has little conception of what may be proper for a person of opulence and distinction. Besides, there are a thousand circumstances which may produce somewhat of a diversity of conduct in persons of equal rank and station. Persons in an inferior station are ready to think that the possession of things that are valuable or splendid, is wrong: but the text does not say that we must not possess the world; for we may possess crowns and kingdoms. Nor does it say that we may not use the world, or even find pleasure in it: for we may use it, and find pleasure in it too; since, as has been before observed, God has "given us all things to enjoy, and richly to enjoy."

*The prohibition relates to the heart and the affections, which are not to be set on the world, or on anything in it, in comparison with God.*And who can judge the heart? *The man who lives in a palace may have far less love of the world, than his censorious neighbor that is living in a cottage.*Let us judge ourselves as severely as we please. But let us leave our neighbor to be judged by him who knows the heart. "To his own master he stands or falls." The rule for us to walk by is plain enough: "Judge not, that you be not judged."

***~~2. Be firm and determined in your own course—~~***

What you are to love, is here plainly declared: "The love of the Father" is put in opposition to the love of the world. And "the doing of God's will," is put in opposition to the seeking of any transient enjoyment. Let this then be your care, "even to love and serve, not the creature but the Creator alone, [Romans 1:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 1.25)." Here you need fear no excess.

On the contrary, as the prohibition extends to the world and to all that is in it, so the command of loving God extends to him, and to all that is in him: his whole mind, his whole will, all his perfections, all his purposes, all his dispensations.

In this respect you may learn of worldly men. See how faithful they are in their adherence to the world; how active in its cause, how laborious in its pursuits, how immersed in its enjoyments, how insatiable in their desires after its richest communications. If you tell them that they are seeking after a mere phantom, they account you either morose or mad.

Be firm against those who would deride your pursuit of heavenly objects; and serve your God, as they serve theirs: wholly, uninterruptedly, and in defiance of all that can be said to turn you from your ways. In a word, "Be steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord;" and know, that when they shall reap only vanity for their recompense, you shall find that "your labor has not been in vain in the Lord!"

***~~#2439~~***

***~~THE TRUE GROUNDS OF A CHRISTIAN'S STABILITY~~***

***~~[1 John 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 2.19)~~***

"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."

There have been many apostasies from the Church of God in every age. Of those who for a time were Christ's disciples, "many went back, and walked no more with him, [John 6:66](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 6.66)." Of such apostates the Apostle Paul also complained, [1 Timothy 5:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Tim 5.12); [1 Timothy 5:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Tim 5.15); and of such John speaks, in the words before us.

There had, many years before, been teachers who "went forth from Judea, subverting the souls of men by inculcating the necessity of circumcision, [Acts 15:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 15.1); [Acts 15:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 15.24)" So now, there were some who separated themselves from John, and the Church under his care; and, either by their false doctrines or unholy lives, brought disgrace upon the Gospel, and obliged the Apostle to guard the whole Christian Church against them. He calls them antichrists; because, in fact, whatever they might pretend, they were the greatest enemies to Christ.

Not that they had ever been truly upright before God: for, if they had been really one in heart and spirit with God's Church and people, they would never have gone out from them; but God allowed them thus to depart, that the Church might no longer be injured by them, or be involved in their disgrace.

But John had a further reason for exposing these apostates. It had been foretold by our blessed Lord, that, previous to the destruction of Jerusalem, "there would arise false Christs, and false prophets, who, if it were possible, would deceive the very elect;" and that the prevalence of those persons would be "a sign that the destruction of the Jewish Church and polity was near at hand, [Matthew 24:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 24.3-5); [Matthew 24:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 24.24-25)." John refers to it in that view: "Little children, it is the last time: and as you have heard that antichrist shall come, even so now are there many antichrists; whereby we know it is the last time." Then he adds, "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."

To elucidate these remarkable words, I will show,

***~~I. Why the insincere are allowed to become apostates—~~***

All who are insincere do not become apostates: for we are told, that the *tares*will grow together with the wheat, even to the harvest, [Matthew 13:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 13.29-30); [Matthew 13:39-40](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 13.39-40). But God is pleased to allow some of those who join his Church to apostatize from it;

***~~1. That they may be EXPOSED to merited disgrace—~~***

Those who are insincere in their profession of religion greatly dishonor God, and do incalculable injury to his Church and people. It is but just, therefore, that they would be left to expose themselves, and to "make it manifest that they never truly belonged to the Church of Christ." They were as branches of the living vine, it is true; but they were only *dead*branches, whose end was to be broken off, and burned, [John 15:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 15.2).

True, they were not distinguished from others by their brethren; who could see no further than the outward act, and were led from Christian charity to put the most favorable construction on all which they did. Not even *Judas*, who was a thief from the beginning, was suspected by his fellow Apostles: in fact, they all questioned their own sincerity, rather than his, [Matthew 26:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 26.22). Much less was *Demas*discoverable by others: indeed, so eminent was his profession, that he was twice joined with Luke, by the Apostle Paul, in his salutations to the Churches, [Colossians 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 4.14). Philemon verse 24. But we can have no doubt but that the world was really uppermost in his heart during the whole time of his profession, though, perhaps, unperceived even by himself: and at last he betrayed to all his lurking preference, and "forsook the Apostle Paul, having loved this present world, [2 Timothy 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Tim 4.10)."

But, as "among the heathen, who did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave up many to a reprobate mind, [Romans 1:28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 1.28);" so he gave up these apostates also to the evils of their own hearts, that on them might come the shame and condemnation which they so richly merited: "They received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved; and God gave them up to their own delusions, that they might apostatize and perish! [John 13:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 13.26-27) with [2 Thessalonians 2:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Thess 2.10-12)."

***~~2. That they may be a WARNING to others—~~***

*Lot's wife*is particularly presented to us in this view. She came out of Sodom with her husband; but her heart was there; and she looked back, and was made a pillar of salt; that is,*an everlasting monument of God's righteous indignation, and a warning to all future generations*. Hence our Lord says, "Remember Lot's wife! [Luke 17:32](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 17.32) with [Genesis 19:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 19.26)."

In like manner, the abandonment of the *Israelites*in the wilderness to their own lusts, and to the punishment consequent upon them, was ordained of God to be a warning "to us, upon whom the ends of the world are come, to the intent that we would not lust after evil things, as they did, [1 Corinthians 10:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 10.6); [1 Corinthians 10:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 10.11) with [2 Peter 2:1-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 2.1-9)." In truth, every instance of apostasy speaks loudly to us, "not to look back, after we have once put our hand to the plough, [Luke 9:62](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 9.62);" since, if we do "turn back, it will be unto perdition! [Hebrews 10:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 10.38-39)," and "our last end will be worse than our beginning, [2 Peter 2:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 2.20-21)."

But the remarkable assertion of the Apostle, relative to the stability of the upright, leads me of necessity to show,

***~~II. What security the upright have, that they shall never be left so to dishonor their holy profession—~~***

It is of great importance that this subject be understood aright. The doctrine of the *perseverance of the saints*, as it is called, is by many accounted extremely dangerous and delusive; but if it is duly explained, and placed on its proper grounds, it will commend itself as perfectly unimpeachable, and as indisputably true.

It is affirmed by some, that there is in true believers an indefectible principle of grace, which renders it impossible for them to fall.

I confess, I think this a very erroneous view of the subject; and I think that the passages of Scripture adduced in proof of this doctrine do not warrant the conclusions drawn from them.

Our Lord, we are told, asserts, that "the Holy Spirit shall be, in his people, a well of water springing up unto eternal life! [John 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 4.14)." But this only marks its constant tendency, without determining its absolute and certain outcome.

Peter also says of Christians, that "they are born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible:" but he tells us, in the very next words, what that seed is; it is not an inward indefectible principle of grace, but "the Word of God, which lives and abides for ever, [1 Peter 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Pet 1.23)."

This throws the true light upon another passage which is cited in confirmation of this point, even on that assertion of John, "Whoever is born of God does not commit sin; for his seed remains in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God, [1 John 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 3.9)." A man really born of God does not, and will not, commit sin, as once he did: for the tendency and operation of divine grace will be to keep him from it.

But the absolute indefectibility of the grace received by him is not here asserted: nor is it asserted in our text, when it is said, that, if those apostates had been really and vitally united to Christ, "they would have remained with the Church." The doctrine itself is true; but the ground on which some endeavor to establish it, is, in my apprehension, unsound and erroneous: for I do not conceive that there is, or ever was, upon the face of the whole earth, a man who could say, "I have within me an indefectible principle of grace, so that I cannot fall, or cannot perish." Even Adam in Paradise could not say that: and I am sure that Paul did not entertain that sentiment, when he said, "I keep my body under, and bring it into subjection, lest that, by any means, after having preached to others, I myself would be a cast-away! [1 Corinthians 9:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 9.27)."

The stability, of which my text speaks, stands on other grounds: it arises from,

***~~1. The immutability of God's purpose—~~***

"God's counsel shall stand; and he will do all his pleasure! [Isaiah 46:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 46.10)." And this counsel he has exercised in reference to the salvation of men; some of whom he has "chosen before the foundation of the world [Ephesians 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 1.4)," yes, and "chosen unto salvation," through faith in his dear Son, [2 Thessalonians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Thess 2.13); and "*those, whom from eternity he has predestined to the adoption of children, he calls and justifies in time, and glorifies in the eternal world!*[Romans 8:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.29-30)."

And, as in his nature "he changes not, [Malachi 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 3.6)." Just so, in reference to these things, "there is with him no variableness, neither shadow of turning, [James 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James 1.17)." On God's immutability our hope, and the hope of all his people, is founded: for, seeing that, "in order to show to us the immutability of his counsel, he has confirmed his promise with an oath, we, who have fled to Christ for refuge, have from that very circumstance the more abundant consolation, [Hebrews 6:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 6.17-18)."

On this ground, all his people maybe confident that "he will perfect that which concerns them, [Psalm 138:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 138.8);" and that "He who has begun the good work in them, will perfect it unto the day of Jesus Christ, [Philippians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 1.6)." On this ground, the very least and weakest of his saints may hope that they shall "endure unto the end, [2 Thessalonians 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Thess 3.3);" since they are assured that God "will never, never leave them, or forsake them, [Hebrews 13:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 13.5-6)."

***~~2. The sufficiency of his grace—~~***

Were man expected to keep himself, then all must sit down in despair. But we expect that God will exert in our behalf that very power which raised up his dear Son from the dead, [Ephesians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 1.19); and that "his strength shall be made perfect in our weakness [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 12.9)." We know that "his grace is sufficient for us, [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 12.9)," however great or numerous may be the difficulties with which we have to contend. We are assured, that "none can ever pluck us out of his hands! [John 10:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 10.29-30);" and that, as "he will not depart from us," so his fear put into our hearts will be sufficient to keep us from ever departing from him, [Jeremiah 32:40](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 32.40). Consequently, we may even now exult and triumph over our enemies, almost as we shall do in Heaven itself, saying, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Yes, we are 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! [Romans 8:35](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.35); [Romans 8:39](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.39)."

It may be asked: Wherein does the difference between the two views appear?

*Things often better explained by an easy and familiar illustration, than by a long train of argument.*We will therefore, with permission, use the simplest illustration that can well be imagined. Only let it be first remembered what it is that we are undertaking to illustrate.

Man, by conversion, is brought into a state which the natural man, by his own powers, can never attain. When he is brought into that state, some think that an indefectible principle is infused into him; and that, in consequence of that abiding and indefectible principle, he is, and must of necessity be, preserved from falling.

I admit that he shall be kept from falling; but I deny that it will be through the necessary influence of grace already received. I assert, on the contrary, that he is in himself as liable to fall as ever, and that it is from an extrinsic source he derives all his stability: and that, consequently, while he has the strongest possible hope in God, he ought to keep in abiding and undiminished exercise a holy fear. Yes more, I must say, that, if once he lose that fear, and become self-confident, he is already on the very verge of destruction!

Now then, take the illustration which is familiar to the mind even of a child. A kite soaring on high is in a situation quite foreign to its nature; as much so as the soul of man is, when raised above this lower world to high and heavenly pursuits. A person at a distance sees not how it is kept in its exalted station: he sees not the wind that blows it, nor the hand that holds it, nor the string by whose instrumentality it is held. But all of these powers are necessary to its preservation in that unnatural state. If the wind were to sink, it would fall. If the hand would cease to hold it, or the string would break, it would fall. It has nothing whatever in itself to uphold itself: it has the same tendency to gravitate to the earth as ever it had; and, if left for a moment to itself, it would fall.

Thus it is with the soul of every true believer. It has been raised, by the Spirit of God, to a new, a supernatural, a heavenly state; and in that state it is upheld by an invisible and Almighty hand, *through the medium of faith*. And upheld it shall be; but not by any power inherent in itself. If left for a moment, it would fall as much as ever. *Its whole strength is in God alone; and its whole security is in the unchangeableness of his nature, and in the efficacy of his grace*. In a word, "it is kept by the power of God, *through faith*, unto salvation, [1 Peter 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Pet 1.5). Peter and Judas fell equally. But they were not equally recovered. And why? Because the Lord Jesus Christ had prayed for Peter, that *his faith (the connecting medium between him and his God) might not fail*."

There is, indeed, one particular, in which the illustration fails; namely, that the kite is upheld without any concurrence of its own; whereas the soul, notwithstanding its entire dependence on God, does yet, in fact, "work out its own salvation." I grant this: I grant, that what God effects for the soul, he effects through the instrumentality of its own volition and action. But it must be remembered, that "it is He, and He alone, who works in the soul either to will or to do, [Philippians 2:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 2.12-13);" and, consequently, that the work is as much his, as if the believer himself were purely passive: only, indeed, inasmuch as the believer's concurrence is necessary, he has the greater cause to implore of God that aid, "without which he can do nothing, [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 15.5)."

If it is said, that here is a distinction without a difference; and that, since the certainty of the saint's salvation is admitted, it signifies not what the means are by which he is saved; I reply, that, on the supposition of the grace which has been once received being absolutely indefectible, a man will feel no occasion for fear: but, if he depends solely and entirely on God, he must exercise fear as well as faith. In the one case, confidence alone is encouraged; but, in the other, humility. In the one case, faith alone is called for; in the other, it must be blended and tempered with holy fear. And this very distinction is marked by the Apostle Paul, "You stand by faith: be not high-minded, but fear! [Romans 11:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 11.20)."

***~~Let me, then, in conclusion say, Behold,~~***

***~~1. What need we have to cry mightily to God for grace—~~***

Perish we must, if God does not uphold us! And it is in the continued exercise of prayer alone that we can hope for those supplies of his grace which are necessary for us: "Pray, then, without ceasing, 1 Thessalonians 5:17;" and beg of him to "hold up your goings in his paths, that your footsteps slip not! [Psalm 17:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 17.5)."

***~~2. What need we have to guard against the means and occasions of sin—~~***

We are in the midst of a defiling and ensnaring world; and have need of continual care and watchfulness, to "keep our garments clean, [Revelation 16:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 16.15)." If we become careless, Satan will not fail to take advantage of us, and to draw us into sin, [Luke 22:31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 22.31).*David and Peter show us very abundantly how frail we are, and how prone to fall, if once we enter into temptation.* Hence we are told to "come out from the ungodly world, and not to touch the unclean thing," if we would have the presence and the blessing of our God, [2 Corinthians 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 6.17). Our eyes, our ears, "our hearts, we must keep with all diligence! [Job 31:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 31.1). [Proverbs 4:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 4.23)." It is by resisting Satan that we must overcome him, [James 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James 4.7); and then only, when we, on our part, contend manfully with him, are we authorized to hope that "God will bruise him under our feet! [Ephesians 6:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 6.11); [Ephesians 6:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 6.13). [Romans 16:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 16.20)."

***~~#2440~~***

***~~THE ANOINTING FROM THE HOLY ONE~~***

***~~[1 John 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 2.20)~~***

"But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth."

It is a melancholy fact, that in every age of the Church, persons have arisen from the bosom of the Church herself, not only to "speak perverse things, and draw away disciples after them, [Acts 20:30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 20.30)," but even to introduce "damnable heresies, and to deny the Lord that bought them, 2 Peter 2:1." Such antichrists had been foretold by our Lord himself; and, even in the apostolic age they existed in great numbers, verse 18. These persons, for a length of time, could not be distinguished from the truly pious: for though the more eminent Christians, who had "the gift of discerning spirits," might see something materially wrong in the spirit and temper of their minds, yet inasmuch as their defects were not generally visible, nor of so determined a character as to call for public censure, *they were allowed to grow up as tares among the wheat, until, by their own willful apostasy, they manifested their character before all*. From their contagion, however, the truly upright were preserved. And that which was made instrumental to their preservation was, "an anointing from the Holy One," whereby they were enabled to "discern all things," and consequently, by "proving all things, to hold fast that which was good."

From hence we see,

***~~I. The distinguishing privilege of true Christians—~~***

***~~They "have an anointing from the Holy One"—~~***

The Lord Jesus Christ is undoubtedly that "Holy One" from whom the anointing proceeds. By this name he is frequently designated, both in the Old Testament, [Psalm 16:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 16.10). [Daniel 9:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan 9.24); and the New, [Acts 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 3.14). [Revelation 3:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 3.7); and, in order to the execution of his mediatorial office, he himself was "anointed with the Holy Spirit, [Acts 10:38](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 10.38)," and fitted for the discharge of all that he had undertaken, [Isaiah 61:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 61.1) with [Luke 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 4.18). It was foretold that he would be so anointed, [Isaiah 11:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 11.1-3); and the prediction was visibly fulfilled at the time of his public consecration to his high office, [Matthew 3:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 3.16-17). Of this Spirit he received "without measure, [John 3:34](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 3.34);" and the holy oil, poured out upon his sacred head, "descends to the skirts of his garments, [Psalm 133:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 133.2)."

But at his ascension to Heaven this divine anointing was committed to him in a more particular manner, in order that he might pour it out upon his people, who were to be anointed to some of the same offices which he himself sustained. This was foretold by David: and the accomplishment of it is declared by the Apostle Paul: but there is a difference between the passage as uttered by the prophet, and as cited by the Apostle; a difference worthy of particular observation. David says, "You have ascended on high; you have led captivity captive; you have received gifts for men, [Psalm 68:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 68.18);" but Paul, in quoting it, says, "When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men, [Ephesians 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 4.8)."

The truth is, that Jesus received this gift, on purpose that he might give it: and he does give it, according to the promise which he made to his people, [John 16:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 16.7), and according to the promise which the Father himself made to them in Abraham two thousand years before, [Galatians 3:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 3.13-14).

***~~This is their distinctive privilege—~~***

"Sensual or natural men have not the Spirit:" and it is in consequence of their not having the Spirit, that "they separate themselves," precisely as those did who are spoken of in the text, Jude verse 19. But every true believer has this divine anointing abiding in him, [John 14:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 14.16-17); and it is from the very circumstance of his having received this anointing, that the believer is emboldened to claim, as it were, a relation to his God, [1 John 3:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 3.24); [1 John 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 4.13). Without this anointing, he would not be able to perform any part of his duty aright: he could not "walk" acceptably to God, but by the Spirit, [Galatians 5:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 5.16); he could "not even pray as he ought, [Romans 8:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.26);" he could "not so much as call the Lord Jesus Christ his Lord, but by the Holy Spirit, [1 Corinthians 12:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 12.3)."

To this divine anointing he is indebted for the very existence of spiritual life in his soul: and the man who has it not, is even dead before God, [Ephesians 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 2.1). And hence he may affirm, without the remotest danger of mistake, that, "if any man be led by the Spirit of God, he is a Son of God, [Romans 8:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.14);" and, on the contrary, that "if any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his, [Romans 8:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.9)."

To estimate aright this high privilege, we must further consider,

***~~II. The benefit true Christians derive from this anointing—~~***

When it is said, that "they know all things," we must of course not so interpret the words as to include the knowledge of arts and sciences, or even a scientific knowledge of religion itself. The Apostle means only that by this divine anointing the Christian attains an acquaintance with all things that are necessary,

***~~1. For his preservation from heretical error—~~***

Human wisdom is not sufficient for this, and the more it is relied upon, the more likely it will be to deceive and ruin us. To be "wise in our own conceit," and to "lean to our own understanding," are marks of extreme weakness and folly; and those who habitually indulge these evils, are sure, at last, to fall: for God, who has promised to guide and instruct the humble, [Psalm 25:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 25.9), has declared, that "he will take the wise in their own craftiness, [1 Corinthians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 3.9)."

That we may see what a preservative this divine anointing is, let us bear in mind, that he who has it, "has in himself the witness" of all the most important truths of Christianity, [1 John 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 5.10); so that, when a deceiver endeavors to subvert his faith, he has in his own bosom a conviction which nothing can shake. He may not be able to answer the arguments that are brought against him, any more than he could maintain a disputation with one who would assert, as some have done, that there is no heat in fire: but he can no more be turned from his persuasion, than he could be made to believe that there is no sun in the firmament, or that he could exist without food.

An adversary might dilate upon the dignity of human nature until his voice failed him: but he could never persuade a Christian that the heart is any other than what God has declared it to be, "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked! [Jeremiah 17:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 17.9)."

He might expatiate upon the sufficiency of man's righteousness to justify him before God: but he could never induce a true penitent to rely on anything but the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, "the righteousness which is from God by faith, [Philippians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 3.9)."

He might assert, as confidently as he should, the ability of man to fulfill the will of God: but the man that has this divine anointing knows "that without Christ he can do nothing! [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 15.5)."

Thus he has, if I may so speak, a *compass*whereby to steer even in the dark, and can traverse the seas in safety; while *those who have only the dictates of human wisdom for their guide, are left to run on rocks and shoals, to their eternal ruin!*[Proverbs 28:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 28.5).

***~~2. For his final salvation—~~***

This divine unction, duly improved, shall be sufficient for everything to which the Christian is called.

By this divine unction:  
he shall mortify remaining sin, [Romans 8:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.13),  
he shall be able to sustain every affliction that can come upon him, 2 Corinthians 12:9,  
he shall be changed into the perfect image of his God! 2 Corinthians 3:18.

We must not, however, misunderstand the Apostle, as though this anointing of the Holy One superseded an attention to the Word of God, or the necessity of continual diligence on our part. *The Word of God is, after all, our only directory for spiritual life and godliness*; and to imagine, as some do, that the light within renders the written word unnecessary, is a very dangerous error. The light within is necessary, just as the light of the sun is for the discovery of time upon the dial: but as the dial is of no use without the sun, so neither will the sun suffice without the dial. Whatever office the Holy Spirit executes, he executes it by and through the written word.

Nor let it be supposed that we can acquire divine knowledge without much studious application to the Word of God: for Solomon tells us, that it is not by either prayer or study, separately, that we can attain knowledge: it must be by both combined: "If we cry after knowledge, and search for it as for hidden treasures, then we shall understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God, [Proverbs 2:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 2.3-5)."

It is proper I would yet further guard against an idea, that this divine anointing supersedes the necessity of watchfulness on our part: for though it is true, that, on the great leading and fundamental doctrines of the fall, and of the recovery by Jesus Christ, the inward witness of these truths may suffice to preserve us; *there are ten thousand errors, into which we may fall, even while we think that we are taught by the Holy Spirit*. From damning error and apostasy he will keep his people; but not from all error; for then there would be no room left for diversity of opinion in the Church of God. But we shall never all "see eye to eye" in this life. There will still be room left for difference of sentiment, in matters of minor importance: and mutual forbearance in relation to them will be necessary, even to the end.

In things essential, there should be unity.  
In things non-essential, there should be liberty.  
In all things, there should be charity.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who doubt the doctrine of our text—~~***

To speak of a divine unction, as given to us to secure us from error, and to bring us to salvation—appears, to many, to be a wild and enthusiastic conceit. They believe that the Holy Spirit was given formerly to the Church for the working of miracles; but they will not believe that he is continued to the Church, for the purpose of guiding, and comforting, and sanctifying the soul.

But to anyone who doubts his need of the Holy Spirit, I would say, What did our blessed Lord mean, when, in counseling the Laodicean Church, he said, "Anoint your eyes with eye-salve, that you may see, [Revelation 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 3.18)." I do not conceive it possible to explain away that passage; or for anyone who believes the Scripture, to doubt but that there is an anointing of the Holy One, which we all need, in order to the attainment of a spiritual discernment. It is the office of the Holy Spirit to "glorify Christ, by taking of the things that are Christ's, and showing them unto us, [John 16:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 16.14)."

Let not prejudice, then, keep any from seeking this inestimable benefit; but let all entreat of God to send down upon them "a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ, [Ephesians 1:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 1.17-18);" and so to "guide them into all truth, [John 14:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 14.26); [John 16:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 16.13)," that they may "be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation."

***~~2. To those who profess to be living in the experience of it—~~***

Have any of you been thus anointed, and thus preserved? Then give God the glory of it; and say with the Apostle, "He who has established us in Christ, and has anointed us is God, [2 Corinthians 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 1.21) with [1 John 2:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 2.27)." But remember, that *the world can only judge of your professions by your practice.*You profess, that "by the anointing of the Holy One you *know*all things:" let it be seen, then, that by the anointing of the Holy One you *do*all things. *It is by your fruits that you must be judged, both by God and man*. See to it, then, that you guard against that conceit which so prevails in heretics and apostates. To your last hour you must retain a childlike spirit, and particularly in the simplicity and teachability of your minds.

You must guard, too, against every corrupt bias. "If your eye is single, then your whole body will be full of light: but if your eye is evil, then your whole body will be full of darkness." In particular, *be careful not to make the truths of God an occasion of needless contention*. For the fundamentals of religion you must indeed contend, and that earnestly, if need be; but even in reference to them, it would be better to recommend to your adversaries, and to cultivate for yourselves, the study of the Holy Scriptures with prayer. In this way, you will "grow both in knowledge and in grace;" and "your light will shine brighter and brighter unto the perfect day."

***~~#2441~~***

***~~BELIEVERS ARE SONS OF GOD~~***

***~~[1 John 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 3.1)~~***

"Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we would be called the sons of God!"

True religion is altogether a mystery—every part of it is deeply mysterious. The restoration of a fallen soul to God! The means of effecting that restoration: the death of God's only dear Son, as a sacrifice for sin; and the operation of his Spirit in the sinner's heart! The effect produced: the translation of a soul from the family of Satan to the family of Almighty God! This is the point which the Apostle is contemplating in my text: and it fills him, as we might well expect, with the profoundest wonder and admiration: "Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we would be called the sons of God!"

That we may enter into the Apostle's views, and attain somewhat of his spirit, I will endeavor to show,

***~~I. What is comprehended in the relation of sons—~~***

No one needs to be informed on this subject, as far as it relates to men. But in the relation as borne to God, there is much which needs to be elucidated. In it are comprehended,

***~~1. An adoption into God's family—~~***

By nature, we belong to a far different family: for "we are of our father the devil:" and, being "children of disobedience," we are also "children of wrath." But God takes to himself a people out of that wretched mass, and adopts them as his own; giving to them the *name*of sons, the *privileges*of sons, the *endearments*of sons, and acting towards them in all respects as a loving Father! It is in and through the Lord Jesus Christ that he effects this. In "sending his Son to redeem those who were under the law," he did it, "that we might receive the adoption of sons, [Galatians 4:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 4.4-5)."

***~~2. A participation of his nature—~~***

When man adopts any person, he may *deal*with the adopted person as his son; but he can never really *make*him a son. But when God sets apart any for this high relation, he creates them anew, and makes them "new creatures." He imparts to them his Holy Spirit, and makes them "partakers of the divine nature, [2 Peter 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 1.4);" so that they become, in reality, his sons; being "begotten of him," and "born unto him, 1 [John 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 5.1); [1 John 5:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 5.18)." Hence, *with the new relation, there spring up in their souls new views, new dispositions, new desires, new habits altogether*, [Galatians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 4.6) and [Romans 8:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.15-16); and in God also there arises, not a mere arbitrary good-will, but a paternal interest, a special regard, such as exists in every part of the creation between the parent and the progeny. All this, then, is comprehended, (this change of nature on their part, and this peculiar regard on his,) when we speak of any as made "sons of God."

***~~3. A title to his inheritance—~~***

This does not necessarily exist among men; but with God it does. Every one that is born of him, is begotten to an inheritance, even an inheritance that "fades not away! [1 Peter 1:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Pet 1.1); [1 Peter 1:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Pet 1.3-4)." "If we are sons, we are also heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ! [Romans 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.17)." There is this peculiarity also attaching to the children of God: they are all his "first-born, [Exodus 4:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 4.22). [Hebrews 12:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 12.23)." They are the brethren of Christ; and partakers with him in all that he himself inherits—his throne, his kingdom, his glory! [Revelation 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 2.21). [John 17:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 17.22).

And now let us contemplate—

***~~II. The wonderful love of God, in bringing us into that relation to himself—~~***

When it is said, "We are called the sons of God," it means that we are really made so. And this change is altogether the effect of God's unbounded love. Behold, then, what manner of love this is:

***~~1. God's love for his redeemed people is sovereign!~~***

It is wholly unmerited on our part. There never was, there never could be, anything in us to attract the Divine regards, since "every imagination of the thoughts of our hearts was only evil continually." In the selection of his objects, God was as free as in the choice of Abraham from amidst an idolatrous world, or of Isaac and Jacob in preference to their elder brethren. In conferring this high honor, God has respect only to his own will, and to the glory of his own name. This is marked with peculiar strength and force by the Apostle Paul, when, speaking on this very subject, he says, "God has predestined us to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he has made us accepted in the beloved, [Ephesians 1:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 1.5-6)." In truth, "He loved us simply because he would love us, [Deuteronomy 7:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 7.7-8);" and because "he loved us with an everlasting love, therefore with loving-kindness has he drawn us! [Jeremiah 31:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 31.3)."

***~~2. God's love for his redeemed people is beyond all human expectation!~~***

If man adopts any one, it is because, having no progeny of his own, he feels a lack of someone to succeed to his estates: and in conferring this favor, he has respect to some qualities in the person selected by him. But God has no *need*of us. We can never add either to his happiness or glory. Or, if he needed any creatures to be objects of his favor, he could create any number, either of angels or men, as it would please him, and make them the happy objects of his choice.

But it is not thus that he has acted. He has chosen from among men, *corrupt and sinful men*, multitudes, who shall in time, be born to him, and in eternity enjoy him. Nor is it of the best of men that he has made his selection, but often of the vilest. Even a murderous Manasseh has been made a vessel of honor, and a monument of grace; while millions of persons, less guilty, have been passed by. If we ask the reason of this, our Lord assigns the only reason that can be given: "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in your sight!" The potter has power over the clay, to do with it as seems good to him: and "shall the thing formed say to him who formed it, Why have you made me thus? [Romans 9:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 9.20-21)."

True it is, that, in reference to this matter, we must say, as David did in reference to the favors conferred on him, "Is this the manner of men, O Lord God? [2 Samuel 7:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Sam 7.19)." No! It is not the manner of men; nor ought it to be: because man has a claim on his fellow-man; but we have no claim whatever on *God. He might have left the whole human race to perish, precisely as he did the fallen angels, and never have saved so much as one!* Just so, he might have saved only one person in whole human race, and that person has reason to exclaim with wonder, 'Why have I been taken, while so everyone else was left to perish in their sins?' God, in all this, does as it pleases him; and "he gives no account to us of any of his matters!" "His ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts. But as the heavens are high above the earth, so are his ways higher than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts! [Isaiah 55:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 55.8-9)."

***~~3. God's love for his redeemed people is utterly incomprehensible!~~***

So the Apostle declares the love of Christ to be! It has "a breadth, and length, and depth, and height, that surpasses knowledge, [Ephesians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 3.18-19)," and defies the search of the brightest intelligence of Heaven. To all eternity will the wonders of this grace be unfolding; and to all eternity will it remain as far from being fully comprehended, as it was at the very first moment it was revealed. Indeed, we must comprehend the infinite distance between the glorious Creator and his rebellious creatures; and then go on yet further, to comprehend all the wonders of redemption, before we can comprehend the smallest portion of this mystery. We must close our meditations, after all, with that with which we have commenced them: "What manner of love is this which the Father has bestowed upon us!"

***~~"Behold!" then, brethren:~~***

***~~1. With due solicitude to ascertain the fact—~~***

God has bestowed this favor upon millions: but has he bestowed it upon us? In this inquiry we are deeply interested: nor should any one of us leave it as a matter of doubt for one single hour. But you will ask, 'Can this point be ascertained?' By the world around us, I readily acknowledge, it cannot be ascertained: and, if we profess to have been brought into this relation to God, we must not wonder that the world ascribes our pretensions to the workings of pride and presumption. For they know nothing of God, or of his operations upon the souls of men: how, therefore, would they be able to judge of our claims in this matter?

The Apostle, in the words following my text, justly adds, "Therefore the world knows us not, because it knew him not." But we may ascertain the point ourselves; for we have a standard by which to try ourselves; and we may examine ourselves by it without any difficulty. John elsewhere says, "To as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to those who believe on his name; who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God, [John 1:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.12-13)." Here are the very relations of which we are speaking, and the means by which we are brought into it, and the test whereby we are to try ourselves.

Inquire, then, whether you have ever "received the Lord Jesus Christ" into your hearts by faith, and whether you are "living altogether by faith in him?" If you have never come to Christ as lost sinners, and cast yourselves wholly upon him, you know infallibly that you are not yet brought into this relation of "sons of God."

But if Christ is "all your salvation and all your desire," then you possess this high privilege; for "we are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, [Galatians 3:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 3.26)." And, if you look up to God for the gift of his Holy Spirit, he will shine upon his own work, and "give you his Spirit, to witness with your spirits, that you are indeed the children of God! [Romans 8:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.16)."

Again then I say, Leave not this matter in suspense; but "examine yourselves, whether you be in the faith, and try your own selves: and never rest, until you can adopt the words of our text with a special reference to your own souls.

***~~2. With a befitting zeal to walk worthy of this high calling—~~***

Certainly, this relation brings with it corresponding duties. If you are made sons of God, it is that you may serve and honor him as his dear children. How this is to be done, Paul informs us: "Be blameless, and harmless, as sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life! [Philippians 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 2.15-16)."

Well, indeed, may the world cry out against your vain conceit, if you are not walking worthy of your high calling. God has called you, that you would be holy: and "if you have in you the hope of which we have been speaking, then you will purify yourselves, even as Christ is pure, verse 3." Look to it, then, that you walk as becomes saints, in all holiness and righteousness before God and man. By this test will you be tried at the last day; and all your professions of faith in Christ will be found a delusion, if you show not your faith by your works. But, if God has, indeed, bestowed this honor upon you, then will his love have a constraining influence upon your souls; and you will strive to be "holy, as he is holy," and "perfect, even as your Father who is in Heaven is perfect."

***~~#2442~~***

***~~THE INESTIMABLE PRIVILEGES OF BELIEVERS~~***

***~~[1 John 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 3.2)~~***

"Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is!"

Our Lord was hated, reviled, and persecuted unto death: but we see how glorious was his person, and how exalted his character. In the same manner his followers are treated with contempt: but God declares their state to be the most honorable upon earth. To this effect John represents them as slighted by man and honored by God.

***~~I. The present state of believers—~~***

The Scripture speaks of believers in the most exalted terms. They are not merely servants, but "sons of God, [2 Corinthians 6:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 6.18)."

***~~This they are by adoption—~~***

Every believer was once a child of wrath, [Ephesians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 2.3). But God takes whom he will into his own family, [Ephesians 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 2.19); he adopts them as his sons, and makes them heirs of his glory, [Romans 8:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.15); [Romans 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.17).

***~~They are brought into this relation also by regeneration—~~***

Once they had only a carnal mind that was enmity against God, [Romans 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.7); but they have been born again of the Holy Spirit, [John 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.13); they are renewed after the image of their heavenly Father, [Colossians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 3.10).

***~~They enjoy this state "now"—~~***

Rich and poor, learned and unlearned, partake alike of this honor; nor does God withhold it from any on account of their remaining infirmities; even now, while the world despises them, does God own his relation to them.

***~~What an unspeakably blessed state is this!~~***

How different is it from the state they were once in! How great are the privileges which they enjoy by means of this relation! How sweet is the sense of this relation often is to their souls! To what a glorious state does it lead them in the eternal world! Well might the Apostle break forth in wonder and admiration! "Behold! How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" [1 John 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 3.1)

Yet, as blessed as it is, it falls infinitely short of what it will be in,

***~~II. Their future state—~~***

***~~Very little is known respecting this—~~***

We can form no idea of spiritual and glorified bodies. We cannot imagine how extensive will be the capacities of the soul. We have very faint conceptions of perfect holiness and perfect happiness. Even one who had seen Christ transfigured, says, "It does not appear what we shall be," etc.

***~~Yet there are some things revealed to us—~~***

We shall *see*Christ, not merely by faith, but with our bodily eyes! [Job 19:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 19.25-27); not veiled as formerly, but in all his glory! We shall *resemble*him too in all his imitable perfections. This resemblance will result from our sight of him. Even "our *bodies*shall be fashioned like unto his glorious body." This shall be fully accomplished at the great day of his appearing.

***~~These things we may be said to "know"—~~***

We have already experienced the pledge of them in our hearts. When we believe in him, we have views of him which we had not before; these transform the soul into his image, [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 3.18). Our Lord has given us the fullest assurance of these things, [John 17:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 17.24). Paul also leaves us no room to doubt, [1 Corinthians 15:49](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 15.49). [Colossians 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 3.4).

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How astonishingly different is the lot of believers and unbelievers!~~***

Believers are the children of God. Unbelievers are the children of the wicked one, [John 8:38](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 8.38); [John 8:44](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 8.44).

Believers can form no adequate conception of the happiness that awaits them. Unbelievers have no idea of the misery to which they are hastening.

How different will be the appearance of each in that day! How different will be their feelings on seeing Christ upon his judgment-seat! For what different ends will their capacities of soul and body be enlarged! What a different state will they experience to all eternity! Let none defer calling upon God for mercy. Let all seek his regenerating grace, and an admission into his family. If we will sincerely believe in Christ these blessings shall be ours! [John 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.12).

***~~2. How bright are the prospects of the true Christian!~~***

The Christian's warfare will soon be over: then will come a blessedness which he cannot now conceive; another day may bring him to the full possession of it. Let these prospects animate every pious soul. Let none allow their minds to be drawn away by the things of time. Let every one stand ready to take his flight, [2 Peter 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 3.12). Let the beloved Apostle be our example, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" [Revelation 22:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 22.20).

***~~#2443~~***

***~~THE FRUITS AND EFFECTS OF GENUINE HOPE~~***

***~~[1 John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 3.3)~~***

"Every man who has this hope in him, purifies himself, even as he is pure."

The people of God are but little known to an ungodly world: instead of being considered according to their true character, they are regarded as hypocrites, enthusiasts, and disturbers of their brethren's peace. But this is easily accounted for: the world knows not God; and therefore it is no wonder that they know not his people.

But the saints themselves have a very inadequate conception of the *honor*that is put on them, or of the *glory*that is reserved for them. They know indeed that they are sons of God; but they have very little idea of what is comprehended in that relation. As to their eternal state, they can form no precise judgment respecting it; they only know, in the general, that they shall be like God, and be with him for ever.

Yet though so little known to the world, and to themselves, they have *marks*whereby they may be clearly distinguished; they may be known by their uniform endeavors after holiness. To this effect the Apostle speaks in the words before us; from which we shall take occasion to consider,

***~~I. The Christian's hope—~~***

Christ is the fountain and foundation of a sinner's hope: without Christ, all must eternally perish: nor has the most eminent saint any more hope than a fallen angel, except as he is savingly interested in the merits of Christ. But through him, in him, that is, in Christ, the believer has a glorious hope:

***~~1. That he is a child of God—~~***

Christ, having purchased us with his own blood, has reconciled us to God, and made us his children. He teaches his followers to consider themselves as standing in this relation to God, not merely like the angels who are his sons by *creation*, but in a more exalted manner by *regeneration*and *adoption*: and he teaches them to expect from him throughout their whole lives the blessing suited to that high dignity, verse 1. [John 1:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.12-13). [Matthew 6:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 6.6); [Matthew 6:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 6.8-9); [Matthew 6:31-33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 6.31-33).

Now the true Christian hopes that he is brought into this happy state, and that he shall receive from God all those endearing tokens of affection which the relation of sonship emboldens him to expect. This hope of his is founded partly on the merits of his Savior, and partly on the internal evidence which he has, that he is savingly interested in the Savior. The mere circumstance of Christ having laid down his life, would not be a sufficient ground for him to number himself among the family of God: but when he has the testimony of his own conscience that he has sought acceptance with God through the death of Christ, then he is enabled to indulge a hope that the privileges annexed to such a state belong to him.

***~~2. That he shall be with God, and like him, forever—~~***

The blessings which the saints enjoy are not confined to this life: "Being sons of God, they are also *heirs*; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ! [Romans 8:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.15-17)." "Though they know not yet what they shall be, they know that, when they shall *see*him, they shall be *like*him; for they shall see him as he is! verse 2." The time is coming, when they shall all be introduced into his immediate presence, and be with him and like him for ever. This also is an object of the Christian's hope: He believes that this is the heritage of the saints; and that "what God has promised, he is able, and willing, to fulfill."

That this is no barren hope, will appear from,

***~~II. The effect it produces in him—~~***

***~~Every Christian will endeavor to purify himself to the uttermost—~~***

*The Christian cannot willfully live in any known sin!*He will search out his *corruptions*, in order to subdue them; and his *duties*, in order to fulfill them. He will propose to himself the Lord Jesus Christ as his pattern: and though he can never hope to attain absolute perfection in this life, he will not rest satisfied with anything short of that. He would gladly be "holy as God is holy, and perfect, even as his Father in Heaven is perfect." He considers how the Lord Jesus acted in reference to God: how in reference to man; and what tempers he manifested in the whole of his deportment; then he labors to follow his example, and to "walk in all things just as he walked."

***~~To these endeavors he will be stimulated by his hope in Christ—~~***

He cannot endure to think himself to be a child of God, and yet act like a child of the devil! He cannot please himself with a prospect of enjoying and resembling God in a future life, without seeking communion with him and a resemblance to him in the present world. He will feel himself impelled to holiness by a sense of duty. He knows he cannot be saved in any other way. [Psalm 24:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 24.3-4). [Matthew 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 5.8). [Hebrews 12:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 12.14). [Revelation 21:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 21.27); by a sense of gratitude [1 Thessalonians 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Thess 2.12). [2 Corinthians 5:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 5.14-15). Yes, moreover, by a love of holiness itself [Psalm 119:128](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 119.128).

We must not however imagine that it is by any power of his own that he thus "purifies himself;" the duty and the exertion are his, [James 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James 4.8); but the power, both to will and to do, proceeds from God alone! [Philippians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 2.13).

***~~We shall improve this subject,~~***

***~~1. For conviction—~~***

All profess to have a hope in Christ: but before we conclude that to be well-founded, we must examine what fruits it produces.

Are we seeking after universal holiness?

Are we contented with no measure of holiness short of perfection itself?

Are we setting the Lord Jesus before us, and taking him for our pattern in all our tempers, and in our conduct towards God and man?

This is the criterion by which John himself teaches us to judge of our hope, verse 6-10; and James confirms it—by declaring, that, if in any one point (the not bridling of our tongue, for instance) we allowedly deviate from this path, "our religion is vain! [James 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James 1.26)." O consider this, lest your hope be only as the spider's web, that will be swept away with the broom of destruction!

***~~2. For encouragement—~~***

Though we must not think our hope to be well-founded, unless it produces in us the fruits of righteousness—yet we must not imagine that our righteousness is to be the ground of our hope, or even our warrant to hope in Christ. The only ground of our hope must be found in Christ, and in the promises which God has made to those who believe in him. We must go to Christ as sinners; and then he will enable us to live as saints. This distinction is clearly marked in the text: our hope in Christ is to precede, not to follow, the purification of our hearts*. Our holiness is to be the fruit—not the root, of our hope*.

The same distinction is made by Paul also, who, having spoken of our sonship with God, says, "Having therefore these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God, [2 Corinthians 7:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 7.1). See the same also by Peter, [2 Peter 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 1.4)." We must not wait until we are cleansed, and then embrace the promises: but we must first embrace the promises, and then make use of them for the cleansing of our souls.

What encouragement does this afford to those who feel the corruption of their hearts, and who, if their own purity were to be the foundation of their hope, would be in utter despair! Go then, however polluted you are, and seek pardon and sanctification at the hands of Jesus; and you shall find him "faithful and just to forgive you your sins, and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness! [1 John 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 1.9)."

***~~#2444~~***

***~~CHRIST MANIFESTED TO TAKE AWAY SIN~~***

***~~[1 John 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 3.5)~~***

"You know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin."

Among the numberless advantages which the light of revelation has conferred upon us, one of particular importance is *the strength of the motives which it suggests to us for the mortification of sin*. A heathen could devise no argument beyond what related to our own welfare, and that of society at large. But Christianity reveals to us wonders, of which unassisted reason could form no conception: it declares to us, that Almighty God himself assumed our nature for the express purpose of counteracting the effects of sin, and of destroying its power. To those therefore who have embraced Christianity, here is an argument that is wholly irresistible, if once it is admitted into the mind, and allowed to have its due operation upon the soul. John avails himself of it in the passage before us.

He is showing to the Christian world that they must aspire after universal holiness, and purify themselves "even as their incarnate God was pure:" and the more effectually to enforce his exhortations, he makes this unanswerable appeal to all of them without exception: "You know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him was no sin."

The destruction of sin being the great scope and end of our ministry also, we will,

***~~I. Open to you his appeal—~~***

***~~The great end of our Savior's incarnation was to take away sin—~~***

Sin has separated man from God, and God from man, [Isaiah 59:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 59.2); nor was it possible that they would be re-united in mutual love and amity, unless this evil were removed. But removed it could not be, either as to its guilt or power, by any efforts of man: nor could all the angels in Heaven render to him any effectual aid. God therefore of his own love and mercy "laid help for us upon one that was mighty, [Psalm 89:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 89.19)," even upon his coequal, co-eternal Son, whom he sent into the world on this benevolent errand, to "put away our sins by the sacrifice of himself, [Hebrews 9:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 9.26)," and to "subdue our iniquities" by the efficacy of his grace, [Micah 7:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 7.19).

For this the Lord Jesus Christ was well fitted, by reason of his own spotless character. This I conceive to be particularly intimated in our text. The connection between the two clauses of the text does not at first sight appear; but we apprehend, that the mention of the spotless character of Jesus is intended to convey this idea, namely, that being himself without sin, he was fitted for the work assigned him; and could present to God such an offering as our necessities required.

Under the law it was especially appointed, that the sacrifices would be without spot or blemish. The Paschal lamb was set apart four days before it was offered, on purpose that it might be scrutinized to the uttermost, and thus be proved fit for its destined use, [Exodus 12:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 12.3); [Exodus 12:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 12.6). The Lord Jesus too went up to Jerusalem four days before his crucifixion, and underwent the strictest examination at different tribunals, and was declared innocent, by Pilate his judge, by his fellow-sufferer on the cross, by the Centurion who presided at his execution. All his enemies thus unwittingly attesting, that he was indeed "a Lamb without blemish and without spot, [1 Peter 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Pet 1.19)," and that, being "just himself," he was every way fit to "suffer in the place of us, the unjust, [1 Peter 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Pet 3.18)."

In another view too his spotless character subserves this great end of his mission: for, "being without deceit himself, he has set a perfect example for us:" and *the best possible way of avoiding sin is to imitate his example, and to "tread in his steps,*[1 Peter 2:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Pet 2.21-22)."

***~~This was known and acknowledged through the whole Christian world—~~***

No one who believed in Christ was ignorant of the end for which he had come into the world. Hence the Apostle could appeal to all without exception, and could say, "You know that he was manifested to take away our sins." The whole Scriptures bore testimony to this. All the types of the Mosaic law shadowed it forth. All the prophecies from the beginning of the world attested it. It was in this way that "the Seed of the woman was to bruise the serpent's head." "To finish transgression, to make an end of sin," and to establish universal righteousness, this was to be the work which would distinguish his reign: "A scepter of righteousness was to be the scepter of his kingdom." The very name that was given to him imported this: "he was called *Jesus*, because he will save his people from their sins."

This truth being acknowledged by all at this time, no less than in the apostolic age, we shall make the same appeal to you, and,

***~~II. Found upon it a particular ADDRESS—~~***

As professing Christians you all "know" that Christ came to deliver you from sin: but do you all consider it, as you ought?

***~~1. You who live in willful and habitual sin—~~***

Do you consider what has been done to rescue you from your bondage? Do you consider that the Son of the living God, "Jehovah's fellow," the Creator of the universe, has come down from Heaven, and assumed your nature, and died upon the cross for your redemption? Ask yourselves then, whether he would have done this, if sin had been so small an evil as you judge it to be? Can you conceive that such means would have been used for your recovery, if the state into which sin had brought you was not beyond measure terrible? Had no misery awaited you, or a misery only that was light and transient, do you suppose that God would have had recourse to such a method of delivering you from it; or that, after he has used such means to take away your sin, you incur no danger by holding it fast?

You may "make a mock of sin," if you please; but you will not think so lightly of it when you come to stand in the presence of your Judge! When the Lord Jesus Christ shall remind you of what he endured to deliver you from it, what will you say to him? Will you then make the foolish excuses that you now do? No, truly—your mouths will then be shut—you will be amazed and confounded at your present folly and impiety: and it will be no consolation to you then that there are so many in the same condemnation with yourself.

The antediluvian scoffers, when warned of the approaching deluge, thought it impossible that such a judgment would ever be inflicted; or consoled themselves, perhaps, that they would be in no worse plight than others. But when the deluge actually came, did they find their own terrors less appalling, or their sufferings less acute, because they were endured by others also? *Nor will you in that day find the wrath of God a whit more tolerable because of the multitudes that shall bear it with you.*

Had the Savior never come, you would have had to endure the wrath of God; but since he has come, and been despised and rejected by you, you shall have to bear "the wrath of the Lamb! [Revelation 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 6.16)," even of that Lamb whom you "crucified afresh! [Hebrews 6:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 6.6);" and Hell itself will be sevenfold more terrible, in consequence of the means which have been used to deliver you from it. Yes, *the punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah will be light in comparison with yours!*[Matthew 10:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 10.15). O that you were wise, and would consider this, before it be too late!

***~~2. You who found your hopes of mercy on your own self-righteous endeavors—~~***

What can you think of yourselves, when you recollect the principles which you yourselves acknowledge? You know that Christ was manifested to take away your sins: how then do you presume to imagine, that you can remove them by any efforts of your own? Is there any such virtue in your own tears or alms-deeds, that you will rely on them, rather than on the atoning blood of Christ? Or is there any such strength in your own resolutions, that you will trust to them for the subduing of sin, rather than to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ?

Does it ever strike you, that while you are entertaining such proud thoughts as these, you are thrusting the Lord Jesus Christ from his office, and virtually declaring, that whatever he may be to others, he shall be no Savior to you? Why will you thus presume to set aside the very ends for which He came into the world? Why, when he has actually girded himself with the towel, and presented himself before you, will you say with Peter, "You shall never wash my feet!" Don't you know that "unless he washes you, you have no part with him, [John 13:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 13.4); [John 13:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 13.8)."

Be assured, he never came to make you your own saviors, but to offer you a free and full salvation. And if you will conceit yourselves to be "rich and increased in goods, and in need of nothing—when you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked," then nothing remains for you but to reap the bitter fruits of your pride and folly! [Revelation 3:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 3.16-17). See also [Romans 9:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 9.31-32); [Romans 10:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 10.3).

***~~3. You who, while you profess to believe in Christ, are walking unworthy of your holy profession—~~***

I call on you also to consider this subject. You profess that the Lord Jesus Christ has borne your sins, and that you therefore expect that no condemnation shall come upon you. But do you think that he will be satisfied with performing half his office? Do you suppose that he will take away your sins as far as relates to their *guilt*, and leave them unmortified as it respects their *power?* This he never will do: and he declares to you that he never will. Only hear how strongly John speaks on this subject in the words following my text: "Whoever abides in Christ, (as you profess to do,) does not practice sin: whoever practices sin has not seen him, neither known him. Little children, let no man deceive you. He who does righteousness, (as you profess to do,) is righteous, even as he is righteous. He who commits sin is of the devil, verse 6-8."

What now will you say, who are still under the dominion of pride, envy, malice, wrath, and whose conduct in your families, instead of exhibiting the image of the Lord Jesus, and constraining all to admire the excellence of vital godliness, causes religion to stink in their nostrils? What will you say who have lewd hearts and licentious tongues? Or you who are covetous and worldly-minded, and who are in such bad repute for truth and honesty, that men would rather deal with an unsaved person than with you? You may boast as you will about the freeness and fullness of the Gospel salvation; but you shall never taste of it, unless you "put off the old man with his deeds, and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness, [Ephesians 4:22-24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 4.22-24)."

***~~4. You who are bowed down with desponding fears—~~***

I must not overlook you; for the text speaks powerfully to you also. In the habit of your minds you are saying, "My sins are too great to be forgiven; or, my lusts are too strong to be subdued." But is Christ unable to effect the work he has undertaken? Was he manifested to take away sins, and has he proved incompetent to the task? Are we not told that "the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse from *all*sin?" And that "his grace is sufficient" for all who trust in him? What then is there in your case that renders you an exception? Oh, do not so dishonor your adorable Savior, as to doubt his sufficiency for the work that has been assigned him. Know that his blood is a sufficient "atoning sacrifice, not for your sins only, but also for the sins of the world;" and the weakest creature in the universe is authorized to say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Put away then your unbelieving fears; and look to him to "accomplish in you all the good pleasure of his goodness." So shall you find that "he is able to save you to the uttermost;" and soon you shall join in that blessed song, "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/esv/Rev 1.5-6)."

***~~#2445~~***

***~~THE END OF CHRISTS INCARNATION~~***

***~~[1 John 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 3.8)~~***

"For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil."

The author of this epistle survived all the other Apostles; so that, long before his death, the professed followers of Christ had had ample opportunity of showing what the effects of religious principle would be, after that the impulse of novelty would have ceased: in some the sacred fire would burn with undiminished ardor; but in others it would languish so as to leave room to doubt whether it were not altogether extinguished. Hence, in this General Epistle, *John lays down a variety of marks, whereby men might judge of their state before God*.

*In the chapter before us he shows the indispensable necessity of holiness, and the extreme danger of imagining ourselves in a state of acceptance with God, while destitute of his image on our souls.* He shows this, as from other topics, verse 3-10, so especially from this, that *the indulgence of any sin counteracts the very end for which Christ came into the world*; since "he was manifested on purpose to destroy the works of the devil."

Let us inquire,

***~~I. What are those works which Christ came to destroy—~~***

Satan, envious of the happiness of man in Paradise, endeavored to bring him to the same state of guilt and misery to which he himself was reduced. How successful he was, it is needless now to mention: we all without exception experience in ourselves the sad effects of Adam's fall. Two things in particular that wicked fiend has introduced:

***~~1. Sin—~~***

Sin was unknown to man, until Satan invaded the peaceful regions of Paradise, and prevailed on Eve to eat of the forbidden tree. He questioned the prohibition itself, or at least the equity of it; and then, denying that any evil consequences would ensue, he urged the vast advantages that would be derived from transgressing the Divine injunction; and thus "beguiled Eve by his subtlety." From that time he has practiced upon others in a similar way, "blinding their eyes, [2 Corinthians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 4.4)," and putting all manner of wickedness into their hearts, [Luke 22:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 22.3). [Acts 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 5.3). It is at his instigation that all the children of disobedience execute their wicked purposes, [Ephesians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 2.2); [Ephesians 6:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 6.11-12); he, as their father, teaches them, and constrains them, as it were, to fulfill his will.

Even the godly he tempts, and labors to deceive by innumerable "wiles," and most subtle "devices, [1 Thessalonians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Thess 3.5). 2 Corinthians 11:3;" and, "if it were possible, he would deceive the very elect."

***~~2. Death—~~***

This also he introduced; for *by sin came death, as its proper "wages," and its necessary consequence*. Satan had assured our first parents that "they would not die:" but in this he showed himself "the father of lies:" and by it he became "a murderer from the beginning, [John 8:41](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 8.41); [John 8:44](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 8.44)." The very instant they obeyed his voice, they died: temporal, spiritual, eternal death became their portion, and the portion of the whole human race! [Romans 5:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 5.12); [Romans 5:15-19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 5.15-19). Nor would any man have ever seen the face of God in peace, if the Lord Jesus Christ had not interposed to "destroy this work of the devil." As to the great mass of mankind, they are experiencing all the bitter effects of that first transgression: inheriting a corrupt nature, they follow the bent of their own inclinations, and rush on blindfold to everlasting perdition! [Ecclesiastes 9:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 9.3). "The devil has taken them in his snare, and leads them captive at his will, [2 Timothy 2:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Tim 2.26)." Hence he is called Apollyon, and Abaddon, [Revelation 9:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 9.11), as being the great and universal *destroyer*.

Nor does he relinquish his endeavors to destroy even the best of men: "he goes about, as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." There are not any so holy, but he shoots his "fiery darts" at them, and torments them with cruel buffetings, [Ephesians 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 6.16). [2 Corinthians 12:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 12.7), and "desires to have them that he may sift them as wheat:" and, were he permitted, he would soon reduce even the soundest of men to chaff!

Let us next inquire,

***~~II. How Jesus destroys sin and death—~~***

Jesus came into the world, and "was manifested" in human flesh on purpose to destroy sin and death: and he effects their destruction,

***~~1. By the virtue of his sacrifice—~~***

The death of Christ was a true and proper atonement for sin; it was "an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world:" and by it "he finished transgression, made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness, [Daniel 9:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan 9.24) with, verse 5." Nor has he merely cancelled our debt, or removed our obligation to punishment, but has "abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light." "On the cross he triumphed over all the principalities and powers of Hell, [Colossians 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 2.15);" and, "by his death, overcame him who had the power of death, and delivered them, who, through fear of death, were all their life-time subject to bondage, [Hebrews 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 2.14)." Yes, when our final victory over sin and death shall be celebrated in Heaven, to this shall we ascribe it altogether, "You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by your blood! [Revelation 5:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 5.9)."

***~~2. By the operation of his grace—~~***

"Dead as we are in trespasses and sins, we are quickened by Christ, [Ephesians 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 2.1), [4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ephesians 2.4);" and immediately begin in his strength to conflict with sin and Satan. The warfare we maintain is attended with many difficulties; so that we are sometimes ready to cry out, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of sin and death?" In our lowest state it is our privilege to add, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord! [Romans 7:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 7.24-25)." "In him we are strong;" and through his gracious communications "we can do all things," "none can be effectually against us, while he is for us." Having infused into our souls a principle of spiritual life, "he dwells in us," and "is himself our life [Colossians 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 3.4)," and carries us forward "from conquering to conquer," until sin and "Satan are bruised under our feet," and "death itself is swallowed up in everlasting victory!"

***~~Observations—~~***

***~~1. How infatuated are those who live in willful sin!~~***

Do they consider whom they serve, and against whom they fight? Do they consider that they are doing those very works which proceed from and characterize the devil, and which Christ was manifested to destroy? Reflect on your conduct, brethren, in this view, and then judge, whether you do well to continue in it.

***~~2. What reason for humility have even the best of men!~~***

There is no one who has not daily occasion to lament his short-comings and defects. We are not any of us so watchful, but Satan finds some opportunities to deceive us; nor so expert in our warfare, but he wounds us occasionally by "his fiery darts." And when that wicked fiend has "gotten an advantage over us," with what exultation is he filled, even though he knows that he can never ultimately prevail against our blessed Lord!

Be watchful, brethren, that you do not so gratify your malignant adversary, or so grieve the Spirit of your adorable Savior. Put yourselves more habitually under the protection and guidance of your Divine Master; and "through him you shall be more than conquerors."

***~~3. How unbounded are the obligations we owe to Christ!~~***

Who but he could have ever redeemed us from sin and death? Who but he could have ever destroyed for us those works of the devil? Think what would have been the state of the world, if he had never become incarnate; what slaves to sin we must have been if he had not liberated us; and what a death we must have undergone, if he had not died in our stead! Truly, if we felt our obligations as we ought, we would scarcely pass a moment without adverting to them, and magnifying him with songs of praise and thanksgiving. Let us dwell on the delightful thought, which, wherever it is entertained, creates a Heaven upon earth: and in a little time our deliverance shall be complete; and we shall unite with all the hosts of Heaven "in singing Hallelujah to God and to the Lamb for ever and ever!"

***~~#2446~~***

***~~THE CHRISTIAN'S DELIVERANCE FROM SIN~~***

***~~[1 John 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 3.9)~~***

"No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God."

Many mistakes in religion arise from not considering sufficiently the style and manner in which the inspired writers are accustomed to express themselves. They speak strongly on all subjects; and never contemplate, for a moment, the niceties of criticism; or dream of their words being weighed in a balance, so as that there shall be the minutest possible precision in their weight and import. They are content with speaking in popular language, and with conveying their opinions in terms which every candid mind shall fully apprehend.

Paul, speaking of the danger of persons who are once enlightened, falling away from the truth which they have received, says, "It is impossible to renew them again to repentance, [Hebrews 6:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 6.4-6)." We are not to suppose, from this, that the restoration of such an apostate is a work which God is not able to effect; but only, that it is a work which we cannot reasonably hope to see effected by him.

The same kind of interpretation must be given to the words which we have just read: we are not to suppose that a regenerate person is brought into such a state that there is an absolute and physical impossibility for him to commit even the minutest sin: such an impossibility as that did not exist even in Paradise, when man was absolutely perfect; no, nor does it exist in Heaven itself; since millions of once holy angels actually did fall, and were cast out of Heaven for their transgression. Not intending his words to be strained to such an extent as that, the Apostle declares,

***~~I. The state of the regenerate man—~~***

To consider the Apostle as saying only that a regenerate man *ought*not to commit sin, would be to make him speak what is altogether foreign to the context; the whole of which evidently shows his meaning to be that the regenerate man does not commit sin.

But, in what sense are we to understand this assertion?

*If taken in its utmost latitude, this assertion would contradict the whole Scriptures.* "There is not a just man upon earth, that does good, and sins not, [Ecclesiastes 7:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 7.20) and [1 Kings 8:46](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Kings 8.46)." "In many things we all offend, [James 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James 3.2)." John himself declares, that "if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us, [1 John 1:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 1.8-10);" and then, intimating that the scope of his observations was to deter men from sin, he adds, "But if any man sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, who is also the atoning sacrifice for our sins, [1 John 2:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 2.1-2)."

It is evident, therefore, that we cannot so construe his words, as to infer from them that a regenerate man has attained a state of sinless perfection. Nor, in reality, do his words properly admit of that sense: for the word which we translate "commit sin" must, of necessity, *imply a continued act*. In, verse 7, he says, "Let no man deceive you. He who does righteousness. See the same word used by John in his Gospel. [John 8:34](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 8.34), (it is the same word as is used in our text) is righteous, even as Christ is righteous." This can never mean that the person who performs one righteous act must necessarily "walk in all things as Christ walked:" *it must import a habit*, and not a mere insulated act: and that is its proper meaning in the text; 'Whoever is born of God, does not willfully and habitually commit sin.' The whole scope of the context, from the third, verse, sanctions, and indeed requires, this interpretation.

It is said in verse 3, that the person who has a scriptural hope of his adoption into God's family, will "purify himself, even as Christ is pure:" and the person who does not labor to attain this purity, is declared, in, verse 8, to belong to a very different family, even that of Satan! "He who commits sin, is of the devil." And in the, verse after the text, this contrast is brought to a point, "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whoever does not *practice*righteousness is not of God."

***~~The assertion, thus explained, is verified in every regenerate man—~~***

*A man "born of God" does not commit sin in the way that he was accustomed to do in his unregenerate state*. Previous to his conversion, sin was the element in which he lived. He might, in respect to an external conformity to the law, be blameless, even as the Apostle Paul was, before his heart was changed: but he never truly gave himself up to God, or took his perfect law as the rule of his conduct. He never lived for God, or made it the one object of his life to glorify God: *self*was the source and end of all his actions. But from the instant of his conversion, his one inquiry is, "Lord, what will you have me to do? [Acts 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 9.6)."

Not that he then becomes perfect: for to his last hour he will find, as the Apostle did, that "there is a law in his members warring against the law of his mind, and occasionally bringing him into captivity to the law of sin, which is in his members." Yes, to his last hour, there are things done by him which he would not desire to do; and things left undone by him, which he would gladly do: so that he is often constrained to cry, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death! [Romans 7:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 7.15); [Romans 7:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 7.19); [Romans 7:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 7.23-24)."

But though, through the influence of his indwelling corruption, he may have occasion to mourn over many deviations from the perfect path of duty, he never does, nor ever will, return to the love and practice of sin. If he sins in anything, he will lament it, and implore forgiveness for it, and labor with renewed diligence and circumspection to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."

If such be the state of the regenerate man, it will be profitable to inquire into:

***~~II. The means by which he has attained to it—~~***

"No one who is born of God will *continue*to sin, because God's seed remains in him."

Let us distinctly mark,

***~~1. What seed this is—~~***

Many imagine that the "seed" here spoken of, is an imperishable spark of grace, which not all the floods of persecution or corruption can ever quench. In this sense many understand [John 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 4.14); as though the water given by our Lord must necessarily outcome in everlasting life. But our Lord speaks, not of its issue, but its *tendency*. But it is not of grace that the Apostle speaks, but of the Word of God. The word is that "seed" of which we are born: and that is incorruptible, as Peter has said: "We are born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, of the Word of God, which lives and abides for ever, [1 Peter 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Pet 1.23)."

***~~2. How it operates to its destined end—~~***

This seed "abides" in those who are born of God. Its operation, in the first instance, was to humble, quicken, and sanctify the soul. Being once implanted in the soul, it grows there, and continues to produce the very same effects which it put forth in the first instance.

Did it come with power to convince of sin? It enlightens the mind progressively, and gives juster views to the conscience, and augmented sensibility to the soul.

Did it lead to the Savior, and inspire with a desire to serve and glorify him? It continues to give brighter discoveries of his love, and to impress the soul with a more fixed determination to live to his glory: and in this way it keeps the believer from ever returning to his former paths.

That this is the true import of the words, is manifest from what is spoken by John in the preceding chapter: "I have written unto you, young men; because you are strong, and the Word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one, [1 John 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 2.14)." Here the same "seed" of which they were born, namely, the Word of God, abides in them; and, in consequence of that, their victories over sin and Satan are carried forward with increasing energy and effect. Such, at least, were David's views of this matter; and therefore to all young men he gave this direction: "How shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto, according to your word [Psalm 119:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 119.9)." And what he recommended to them, he practiced also himself; as he himself immediately declares: "Your word have I hidden within my heart, that I might not sin against you, [Psalm 119:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 119.11)."

Thus then it is that *the regenerate person is kept from committing sin, as he was accustomed to do in his unregenerate state*: "The word of truth abides in him," both as an authoritative director, and an unerring rule; and "by it he is made free, [John 8:32](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 8.32)," and "sanctified, [John 17:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 17.17)."

The blessedness of the believer's state will yet further appear, while we consider,

***~~III. His security for the continuance of it—~~***

"He *cannot*sin, because he is born of God." Now it is well known, that many identify the new birth with baptism, at least so far as to maintain, that if they be not actually the same thing, they are always simultaneous and inseparable. But let this sentiment be brought to the test: let it be seen, whether it can be said of every one that is baptized, that he does not commit sin, yes, and that he cannot commit sin, because he is baptized. I would ask, Is there a man in the universe that dares to make such an assertion as this? Or, if there were, would not the experience of the whole world flatly contradict him?

I will not say that God may not convert a person at the time of his baptism, as well as at any other time. God may make use of any rite, or any ordinance, or any occurrence whatever, to effect his own purposes: but to say that he always creates a man anew, in the way, and to the extent, that my text speaks of, under the ordinance of baptism, is as contrary to truth as any assertion that ever proceeded from the lips of man. And as long as these words remain in the Bible, that a man "cannot sin, because he is born of God," so long it must be obvious to every dispassionate mind that *there is a new birth perfectly distinct from baptism, and totally independent of it.*

As for the idea, that sin, when committed by a regenerate person, is not sin, it is too wild, and too impious, to deserve a thought.

But it is a great and glorious truth, that a person truly born of God cannot sin, as he did before he experienced that change. If it is asked, Why he cannot sin? I answer,

***~~1. Because God has engaged he shall not—~~***

God has said, that "sin shall not have dominion over his people, because they are not under the law, but under grace [Romans 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 6.14)." And his faithfulness is pledged to "cleanse them from all unrighteousness, 1 [John 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 2.9)." It is a part of his covenant; every iota of which he will assuredly fulfill. This, however, is not to be so understood, as if God would never permit his people to err in any respect: for the very best of men have erred, and grievously too, under the influence of strong temptation, and of the remaining corruptions of their own hearts. But God, under such circumstances, will chastise them, until they shall return to him with deep humiliation and contrition, and until they renew their application to the blood of that great Sacrifice which takes away the sins of the world. "It is not his will that one of his little ones would perish;" "nor will he allow anyone to pluck them out of his hands."

***~~2. Because he will supply him with grace, that he may not continue in sin—~~***

This, also, is a part of God's covenant which he has made with us in the Son of his love. If this covenant were kept out of view, there are two things which we might justly apprehend:

the one is, that God would depart from us;

the other is, that we would depart from him.

But on both parts God has undertaken for his people. He says, "I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good; and I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me, [Jeremiah 32:40](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 32.40)." It was not by a mere act of his power that he converted them at first: he enlightened their understanding, and renewed their heart, and "made them willing in the day of his power." So will he even to the end deal with them as rational beings, and "draw them with the cords of a man." "He will keep them, indeed, by his own power, [1 Peter 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Pet 1.5);" but it shall be through the instrumentality of their own exertions. He will keep them; but they shall also "keep themselves; so that the wicked one shall not touch them, [1 John 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 2.14), before cited." Thus secured by God's engagement for them, on the one hand, and by the mighty working of his power in them, on the other hand, it may truly be said of them, "They cannot continue in sin, because they are born of God."

***~~Yet let me improve this subject,~~***

***~~1. In a word of caution to the secure—~~***

The doctrine of Final Perseverance, if unscripturally maintained, will be productive of the most fatal consequences to the soul. Shall any man say, 'I am born of God: and therefore can never perish, though I live in sin?' Let him rather say, 'The sins which I commit, prove to demonstration, that I am not born of God. I may have been partially affected with the word, as the stony-ground hearers; and have produced some kind of fruit, like the thorny ground: but, inasmuch as I "bring forth no fruit to perfection," I am at this very moment a child of Satan, and an heir of perdition.'

*Would you have an evidence that you are born of God? Inquire whether you are delivered from the love and power of sin, and following after universal holiness.*These are the marks whereby alone you can form any sound judgment: and if you will judge of yourselves by this test, you will remove from the doctrine of Final Perseverance the chief objection that is urged against it; and will render it a blessing, instead of a curse, to your own souls.

***~~2. In a word of encouragement to those who are writing bitter things against themselves—~~***

Some, because they feel in themselves remaining infirmities, will conclude that they cannot possibly have been born of God. But we must not so interpret the text, as to imagine that God's people must be absolutely perfect. *Were none but the perfect born of God, where would we find a child of God on earth? It is the willful and deliberate habit of sinning, and not a mere infirmity, that is declared to be incompatible with a state of grace: and therefore let not a sense of weakness and infirmity cause any one to despond.*

Yet, on the other hand, it will be well to entertain a holy jealousy over ourselves; and to avoid too great a laxity in our interpretation of this passage, as well as too great a strictness: for if there be in us, what is found in too many *professors*of religion, a habitual predominance of evil tempers or dispositions of any kind—we are certainly not born of God, but are children of the devil.

At the same time, let it be remembered, that the word of inspiration is that great instrument whereby God effects his purposes on the souls of men. By that he begins, and carries on, and perfects, his work within us. Let that, therefore, be precious to us, yes, "more precious than thousands of gold and silver;" and "let it dwell richly in us, in all wisdom," so shall we experience it to be "the rod of God's strength," and "have every thought of our hearts brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

***~~#2447~~***

***~~LOVE OF THE BRETHREN~~***

***~~[1 John 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 3.14)~~***

"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren."

Love is said to be "the fulfilling of the law," and it certainly is also the great end of the Gospel. But love is of different kinds: there is a love of benevolence, a love of beneficence, and a love of delight. The two former are due to all mankind: the latter is due to the saints alone; because they alone possess that character in which God delights, or in which it befits us to feel delight. It is of this last kind of love that the Apostle speaks in my text, a "love of the brethren:" and of it he speaks in the highest terms imaginable. To illustrate his views of it, I will show,

***~~I. What is that change which every true Christian has experienced—~~***

It is not a change of opinions merely, or a transition from one Church to another, but:

***~~1. A change in his state before God—~~***

The unregenerate man is "dead in trespasses and sins." Even "by *nature*he is a child of wrath, [Ephesians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 2.3);" and, by *practice*, he has involved himself in the deepest guilt and condemnation. But in conversion, a marvelous transition takes place: "he passes from death unto life." By believing in Christ, he obtains a remission of all his sins; they are blotted out of the book of God's remembrance; and there "no longer remains any condemnation to him on account of them, [Romans 8:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.1)." *From being a child of Satan, and an heir of wrath—he is made a child of God, and an heir of glory!*

***~~2. A change in the entire habit of his soul—~~***

During his unconverted state, he lived to self alone: he had no thought or desires beyond this present world: he was altogether "alienated from the life of God," "an atheist in the world [Ephesians 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 2.12)." As the body, when separated from the soul, is dead, and performs not any one function of the animal life; so his soul, being separated from God, is dead, and never once performs any spiritual act whatever.

But in his conversion, a similar change is wrought. His powers are quickened: his understanding, his will, his affections, are all called forth into act and exercise on spiritual subjects: so that "old things pass away, and all things become new." This change is not unlike that of a river which, by an invisible agency, is turned so as to flow in a direction opposite to its natural course, even upward, towards its source and head. Being thus "renewed in the spirit of his mind," "he lives no longer to himself, but unto Him who died for him, and rose again".

It will now be proper to inquire,

***~~II. How far the test, here proposed for the ascertaining of this change, may be depended on—~~***

***~~Beyond a doubt, this change may be ascertained to the satisfaction both of ourselves and others—~~***

It is not to be supposed that so great a change would be effected both in the state and habits of a man, and he himself be unconscious of it. It is a matter of the deepest interest with him; and he will never be satisfied, until he "knows" that he has attained this great object of his desires. There are many marks by which it may be discovered, even as a tree by its fruits. The test here proposed is amply sufficient for this end. The only danger is, of mistaking the test itself, and putting something else in the place of it.

***~~"The love of the brethren," duly understood, will serve as an unerring test—~~***

Two things must be borne in mind, as distinguishing the true test from all its counterfeits. The "love of the brethren" is a love to them purely for Christ's sake, and a love displaying itself towards them in all its proper offices. It is not a love to them on account of their having embraced our opinions, or their belonging to our party; nor will it show itself merely in speaking well of them, and in espousing their cause. It is called forth by the single circumstance of their being the friends and servants of the Lord Jesus Christ: and it will show itself in such a deportment towards them, as we would maintain towards the Lord Jesus Christ himself, if he were circumstanced as they are.

The description given of love in the 13th chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, is precisely that which the Christian will realize in his conduct towards true Christians of every denomination: and then only is it a proper test of our conversion to God, when it so operates. But, supposing it to be of this kind, then may we "know" from it, without a shadow of doubt, that "we have passed from death unto life:" for such love can proceed from God alone: it springs from no root whatever but faith in Christ: and, consequently, its existence and operation in the soul proves us to be true believers, children of God, and heirs of glory.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who are strangers to this peculiar regard—~~***

If the existence of it in the soul proves that we have passed from death unto life—then the non-existence of it may well lead you to fear that this change has never been wrought in you. Examine yourselves, therefore, and try your own selves. In truth, this test is of peculiar importance to you: for, if you will look within, you will find that, by nature, you are rather alienated from persons on account of their relation to Christ, than drawn to them: the lack of congeniality of taste and sentiment sets you at a distance from them; and a consciousness of this may well lead you to conclude that you are yet dead before God. The Apostle tells us this, in the very words following my text, "He who loves not his brother, abides in death." O consider this, before it be too late: and seek that change, without which you must for ever perish!

***~~2. Those who think themselves under its influence—~~***

It must be confessed that persons are very prone to deceive themselves on this point; and to imagine that they love the brethren, when their regard is merely partial towards their own denomination, and when it is associated with many dispositions contrary to love.

Remember then, I beg you, that your love, in order to be genuine, must be:  
*heavenly*in its origin, *holy*in its exercise, and *uniform*in its operations!

See, I beg you, whether your love be of this kind, before you venture to build upon it such a confident persuasion as that mentioned in my text.

***~~3. Those who are truly alive to God—~~***

Show, in your whole spirit and temper, what the effect of the Gospel is. It was said of the primitive Church, Behold how these Christians love one another! Let the same mark be visible in you, and the same confession be extorted from all your adversaries: bear in mind all the offices of love, that it "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." You must not expect your brethren to be perfect: for you yourselves are not perfect. Therefore the allowances which you need from others, you must make for them: and you must take care, in thought, word, and deed, that nothing be done by you contrary to love. Be sure, therefore, that "your love be without deceit;" and that it shows itself "not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth."

***~~#2448~~***

***~~THE LOVE OF CHRIST A PATTERN FOR US~~***

***~~[1 John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 3.16)~~***

"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers."

In contemplating Christianity as a system, we scarcely know whether to admire more, the *depth of its mysteries*, or the *height of its requirements*. Of all mysteries, that specified in our text, the death of our incarnate God for the sins of men, is beyond all comparison the greatest: and, of all requirements, there is not one so arduous as that, which also is here inculcated, of laying down our lives for the brethren. The two taken together present Christianity in a most endearing view; and exhibit it as alike conducive to the perfection of our nature and the completion of our bliss. Let us notice,

***~~I. The extent in which God has manifested his love to us—~~***

If we survey the works of creation, we shall see *love*inscribed upon them all. There was not one which the Creator himself did not pronounce to be "very good:" and, if there is anything within the whole compass of it that is noxious to man, it was not so according to its *original*constitution, but has been rendered so by sin.

If we mark also the dispensations of providence, we shall find in all of them too, the same blessed character of love: for *the very anger of God is only an exercise of paternal love; and his judgments, an effort to bring his offending creatures into a state of reconciliation and acceptance with him*.

But it is in redemption that his love is chiefly displayed: for, in order to effect it, Jesus Christ assumed our nature, and actually "laid down his life for us."

In order that we may behold somewhat of the love displayed in this stupendous act, let us consider,

***~~1. What our situation was, that rendered such an effort necessary—~~***

We were fallen into sin, after the example of "the angels that kept not their first estate;" and with them we must have taken our portion to all eternity. To deliver ourselves was absolutely impossible: nor could the whole creation afford us any effectual aid. *The judgments denounced against sin must be executed, either on the sinner himself, or on one capable of standing in his place, and of satisfying all the demands of law and justice*.

But where could such a one be found? The first archangel was unequal to the task. None but God himself could interpose with effect, even that God, whose law we had violated, and whose majesty we had offended. *Such was our helpless and hopeless state, when Almighty God determined to rescue us from our misery, by sending his only dear Son into the world to offer up himself a sacrifice for sin, and, by dying in our stead, to redeem us from all the penal consequences of our sins*.

***~~2. What Jesus has accomplished for us in his sin-atoning death—~~***

Our guilt is expiated. And God is reconciled unto his offending creatures: We may now go to him in the name of his dear Son. We may plead the merit of his obedience unto death. The vilest sinner in the universe has no occasion to despair. All that is necessary for his acceptance with God has been done; and he needs only to "lay hold on the hope set before him," and to embrace the salvation that is freely offered to him. *If only we believe in Jesus, justice itself is become our friend and our advocate: because its utmost demands having been satisfied in Christ's obedience unto death*, it claims, on behalf of all who believe in Jesus, the transfer of those rights to which, through the intervention of our Surety, we are entitled.

***~~3. What wonders of love are contained in Jesus' sin-atoning death—~~***

To what, but love, can we trace this merciful interposition of the Deity in our behalf? Was there anything in us to merit it at God's hands? We, alas! were in the very state of the fallen angels, "ungodly," "sinners," "enemies," filled with all evil, and destitute even of a good desire.

But, if God could find no inducement from anything that was in us to exercise this mercy towards us, was there none to be found within his own bosom? No, not any. *He would have been equally happy and equally glorious, if neither men nor angels had ever existed*: and, if neither his happiness nor his glory have been at all affected by the ruin of the one, neither would it have been by the ruin of the other, if we, like them, had been left to perish to all eternity. *To his sovereign love and grace alone can we trace this stupendous act of mercy in redemption of lost sinners*: and to that it is uniformly traced in the Holy Scriptures:

"God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.16)."

"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, [1 John 4:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 4.9-10)."

"God commends his love towards us, in that, when we were yet sinners, Christ died for us, [Romans 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 5.8)."

To all eternity will this be the one subject of wonder, and adoration, and thanksgiving to all the hosts of the redeemed, "To him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, be glory and dominion for ever and ever! [Revelation 1:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 1.5-6)."

Our meditations on this subject will be the best preparation for considering,

***~~II. The extent in which we should exercise love to our brethren—~~***

*To imitate our blessed Lord and Savior, as far as possible, is our bounden duty*—and especially are we commanded to do so in the exercise of love. Again and again does he require us to "love each other as he loved us, [John 13:34](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 13.34); [John 15:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 15.12);" and the duty is enforced from the very same consideration as is proposed to us in the text, [1 John 4:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 4.11).

***~~1. Consider our duty towards "our brethren" of mankind at large—~~***

*There is not a human being towards whom we do not owe a debt of love.*And were it in our power, there is not a pain which we would not alleviate, nor a necessity which we should not supply. This is particularly noticed in the words following our text: "Whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother have need, and shuts up his compassion from him, how dwells the love of God in him?"

But if this be our duty towards them in reference to their temporal wants, how much more is it in reference to the concerns of their souls! How should we weep over the unhappy state of the heathen world, immersed as they are in darkness, and subjected to the entire dominion of the god of this world! What efforts should we not make for the enlightening of their minds, and for the revealing to them that love, that stupendous love, with which our God has loved both us and them!

Say, brethren, do you not blush when you look back upon your conduct in this respect, and see what contracted views you have had of your duty towards them, and how little you have endeavored to discharge your duty, even as far as it has been seen and acknowledged by you?

Consider more especially your duty towards your Jewish brethren, from whom you have received all the light which you yourselves enjoy: would it be no grief to you to see that highly-favored people so blinded by prejudice, that, with the Scriptures in their hands, they despise, and even execrate, that very Savior who has shown such love to them? Why do we not feel for them? Why do we not exert ourselves in their behalf? Why do we not endeavor to repay to them the debt of love which we have received from their forefathers? The Apostles, and multitudes of their descendants in the ministry, laid down their lives for us, accounting themselves richly recompensed if they might but lead us to the knowledge of the true God, and of Jesus Christ whom he has sent. O that there were in us a corresponding sense of our duty, and that we could, with one heart and one mind, rise to the performance of it!

***~~2. Consider our duty towards our true Christian brethren in particular—~~***

There is an especial duty towards those who are united to the Church of Christ: "We are to do good unto all men, but *especially*unto those who are of the household of faith." We owe to them a pre-eminent degree of love, because they are so near to us, and because they are so dear to God, and more especially because there is such an identity of interest between Christ and them. They are our brethren in a higher sense than others, being children of the same heavenly Father, and heirs of the same glorious inheritance. From all eternity have they been objects of God's electing love; and now they are the monuments of his grace, the very temples in which he deigns to dwell. Every one of them is a member of Christ's mystical body, yes, "one spirit with him:" so that whatever we do for them, we do for Christ himself, as much as if he were personally present with us, and the visible object of our attentions.

What love then do we not owe to these? I hesitate not to say, that our very life should be of small estimation with us in comparison with their welfare; and that martyrdom itself, if endured for the benefit of their souls, ought not to be an object of dread, so much as of desire and joyful sacrifice. We see this love in Aquila and Priscilla, [Romans 16:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 16.4), and in Epaphroditus also, [Philippians 2:30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 2.30); but more especially in the Apostle Paul, who was contented to be "in deaths often" for the benefit of the Church, and who, in the near expectation of martyrdom, could say, "If I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all! [Philippians 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 2.17)."

***~~For the further improvement of the subject,~~***

***~~1. Let us contemplate our obligations—~~***

The love of God, which ought to be ever uppermost in our minds, alas, how light an impression does it make upon us! Even the mystery of the incarnation of God's only dear Son, and of "his laying down his life for us," is heard without any emotion, and regarded with little more concern, than if it were only "a cunningly-devised fable." What shall I say then, brethren? Must there not be something essentially wrong, where such insensibility exists? are we not ashamed? are we not confounded, when we consider the state of our souls in this respect?

Let us rise to a sense of our duty.

Let us view our obligations to Almighty God.

Let us dwell upon them night and day.

Let us never rest until our whole souls go forth in love to him, who has loved us, and given himself for us.

***~~2. Let us address ourselves to our duties—~~***

Methinks, the duty of love should be no burden to us: it is in itself most delightful; and brings always its own reward along with it. Let us then exercise it in all its branches. Let every disposition contrary to love be mortified and subdued: all envy, hatred, malice, wrath, uncharitableness; let it all be banished from our hearts; and *let the love which hopes all things, believes all things, endures all things—be the one reigning principle in our souls.*

Let this principle too be brought into activity for the benefit of all mankind. Our time, our talents, our property, our very life—let it all be consecrated to the Lord for the glory of his name, and for the welfare of his redeemed people. Let us not be indulging vain excuses, and saying, 'This will require *sacrifices*, which I am unwilling to make, and *abilities*which I do not possess.' What sacrifice is there beyond that of life? Even that it is our duty to make for the world and for the Church; and therefore every subordinate sacrifice would be of no account. And as for talents and abilities, if only we will use those which we have, God will glorify himself by them, and render them subservient to the welfare of mankind, if only we will endeavor to improve them with diligence, and to exercise them with fidelity.

You see what God would have us both to be and do:*he would have us overwhelmed with a sense of his love to us, and abounding in the most self-denying exercises of love to all mankind*. Come, brethren, gird yourselves to the occasion. Your God and Savior demands it at your hands. The whole universe also joins in one common cry, "Come over to us, and help us." And he who most abounds in offices of love to others, shall receive the richest recompense into his own bosom from that God whose name and nature is "Love."

***~~#2449~~***

***~~NO LOVE TO GOD WITHOUT LOVE TO MAN~~***

***~~[1 John 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 3.17)~~***

"If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?"

Under the law there were two great commandments: the first was, to love God with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength. The second was, to love our neighbor as ourselves. And under the Gospel they are still in force, or rather, I would say, are enjoined more emphatically than ever, being enforced with new motives, so as to bear the stamp and character of "a new commandment, [1 John 2:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 2.7-8)." They are on no account to be separated in our practice and regards; neither can one be obeyed without the other.

True, indeed, many will flatter themselves that they obey the one, while they are notoriously regardless of the other. But they only deceive their own souls: and this so palpably, that the Apostle appeals to the offenders themselves, and makes them judges in their own cause: "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?" He may pretend to love God; but the love of God is not in him: for "if he does not love his brother whom he has seen, he can never truly love God whom he has not seen, [1 John 4:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 4.20);" and consequently he is destitute of all religion.

In confirmation of this truth, I shall show,

***~~I. That man can have no true piety, who is destitute of love to God—~~***

The Apostle takes this truth for granted; and makes it the foundation of his appeal. But I lament to say, that it needs to be brought home to our consciences with more force than we are accustomed to assign to it in our own minds.

***~~That God deserves our love, cannot be denied—~~***

View him in his works of creation. No sooner had he formed everything, than he pronounced it "very good." See man in his compound state both of body and soul: how fearfully and wonderfully are we formed in our corporeal frame! and with what astonishing powers are our souls endued, insomuch that we are capable of appreciating in a measure, all that we behold with our eyes, and can soar also to the contemplation of the invisible God himself, and are capable of knowing, loving, serving, and enjoying him.

Behold the earth and all that it contains; how formed for the service and the use of man! Yes, and all the heavenly bodies also, how do they too in their orbits (for in all probability the whole solar system forms but a part of other systems, with which it moves) administer to the comfort and happiness of man!

And is not the Creator of all this worthy of our love?

View him in his works of providence. All this has God upheld, if not in its original grandeur—yet in its ministrations to the good of man; and that too notwithstanding all the provocations which he receives continually at our hands. All our faculties both of body and mind are continued to us: while the whole terraqueous globe affords us sustenance, and the heavenly bodies, according to their capacities, minister to our necessities and comforts. True, the world was once drowned with water; and the cities of the plain were consumed with fire: but this only shows us what might have been daily expected, if God had dealt with us in any respect according to our deserts.

Should not then such a long-suffering and gracious God be made an object of our most intense regard?

But view him in his great work, the work of redemption: and what shall we say of him there? View him as taking our very nature, and becoming in all things like unto us, sin only excepted. View him as dying upon the cross, and expiating our guilt by the sacrifice of himself. View him as sending down from Heaven his Holy Spirit to dwell in our hearts, and by his enlightening, quickening, transforming energies, to render the work of Christ effectual for the salvation of all who will believe in him. But here I seem to exceed the utmost bounds of credibility. Yet so it is; and this is the God who calls us to set our love on him.

What then shall I say of the man who complies not with this reasonable demand? I appeal to you, my brethren, whether such a man, supposing such a one could be found, can have any true religion?

Perhaps you will say, 'It is impossible that such a monster would exist!' Then let us submit the matter to a test, the test proposed to us by the Apostle himself.

To do this, we affirm,

***~~II. That man can have no true love to God, who is destitute of love to man—~~***

Love to God must of necessity comprehend in it these three things:  
a regard for his authority;  
gratitude for his mercies;  
and zeal for his glory.

Let us see then whether the man who "sees his brother in need but has no pity on him," has any one of these?

***~~1. Has he any regard for God's authority?~~***

God most solemnly enjoins under the Old Testament compassion for our indigent brother, and a willingness to relieve him, [Deuteronomy 15:7-11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 15.7-11). He requires the same under the New Testament, [1 John 4:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 4.21); He informs us who the person is to whom we are to manifest this love, even every man, [Luke 10:29-37](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 10.29-37); He tells us from whom he expects this grace, even from the poor, who are constrained to get their own living by manual labor, as well as from the rich and great, [Ephesians 4:28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 4.28). [Acts 20:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 20.34-35). He has enforced this duty by every kind of argument:

by *promises*the most engaging, [Isaiah 58:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 58.7-8);

and by *threatenings*the most tremendous, [James 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James 2.13).

He has declared that it shall form his rule of judgment in the last day, and determine our eternal destinies, [Matthew 25:34](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 25.34); [Matthew 25:41](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 25.41); [Matthew 25:46](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 25.46).

Now then what regard can he have to God's authority who lives in the neglect of this duty? He says, in fact, "My goods are my own, and I will dispose of them as I please. As for God, I know him not; neither will I obey his voice."

***~~2. Has he any gratitude for God's mercies?~~***

Our blessed Lord, reminding us what temporal blessings his heavenly Father bestows upon us, calls us to an imitation of him in our conduct towards our fellow-men, so that we may approve ourselves as his children by our resemblance to him, [Matthew 5:44-45](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 5.44-45); [Matthew 5:48](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 5.48).

Still more particularly is his redeeming love proposed to us! View his love for us both as a motive and a pattern:

a motive which we should never withstand, 2 Corinthians 8:7-9; a pattern which to the very utmost we should follow, even to "the laying down of our lives for the brethren, verse 16."

To stimulate us to it the more, he tells us that he will receive everything as done to himself, [Matthew 25:40](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 25.40); that he will account himself our debtor for it, [Proverbs 19:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 19.17); and that he will submit to be accounted "unrighteous" if he fails to acknowledge and reward it in the last day, [Hebrews 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 6.10).

For our further encouragement he assures us, that, however light we may think of such a service, it is "a sacrifice with which he is well pleased, [Hebrews 13:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 13.16)."

Now if all this does not prevail with us to show kindness to our brethren, what shall we say? Have we any gratitude to God? No, we are more stupid and senseless than the beasts themselves! [Isaiah 1:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 1.2-3).

***~~3. Has he any zeal for God's glory?~~***

We are commanded to "make our light shine before men, that those who behold it may be constrained to glorify our Father who is in Heaven, [Matthew 5:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 5.16)." And our Lord assures us that "herein is the Father glorified, when we bring forth much fruit, [John 15:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 15.8)," yes, that "all our fruits of righteousness are by him to the glory of God the Father, [Philippians 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 1.11)." But in a more particular manner is our liberality to the saints spoken of in this view, inasmuch as it calls forth "abundant thanksgivings to him" from the persons relieved, and causes them to glorify God for our professed subjection to *the Gospel of Christ, the proper tendency of which is to generate these heavenly dispositions, and to augment the happiness of all mankind*, [2 Corinthians 9:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 9.12-14).

Now suppose a man to neglect this duty, what zeal can he have to promote the glory of his God? He may imagine himself to be religious; but he has no more love to God than Satan himself! For, if "faith without works is no better than the faith of devils," the religion of such a man is no better than the religion of devils! [James 2:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James 2.17-19). For so has God said: "In this the children of God are manifest and the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, neither he who loves not his brother, [1 John 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 3.10)."

***~~Let me now add,~~***

***~~1. A word of caution—~~***

It is easy to mistake alms-deeds for Christian liberality. But the Apostle cautions us against all such mistakes in verse 18. We should draw forth not our money only, but our soul, to the hungry, [Isaiah 58:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 58.10-11). Nothing is truly Christian but what proceeds from love to God as reconciled to us in Christ Jesus, and is done for the advancement of his glory.

***~~2. A word of encouragement—~~***

Abound in this duty, and it shall bring a rich reward! "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! [1 Timothy 6:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Tim 6.18-19).

***~~#2450~~***

***~~A GOOD AND EVIL CONSCIENCE~~***

***~~[1 John 3:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 3.19-21)~~***

"This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God."

In the description given to us of the day of judgment, we are informed that the Judge will be seated on his throne; that certain books will be opened; and that sentence will be passed on every one according to what was recorded in them, [Revelation 20:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 20.12). Such a tribunal there is, already erected in the bosoms of men. *Conscience is seated there as supreme judge*:  
it keeps an account of every day's transactions,  
it summons men to its bar,  
it exhibits the record before their eyes, and,  
in perfect correspondence with their actions, it passes on them its authoritative sentence.

Thus conscience anticipates the future judgment, and forces men to read in its decisions their final doom. To this effect the Apostle speaks in the passage before us; in elucidating which, we shall show,

***~~I. How far the testimonies of our conscience may be depended on—~~***

***~~The testimonies of conscience are not always just—~~***

With many there is a searedconscience, which allows men to go on in their own ways without shame, and without remorse. So inactive and so callous is this faculty within them, that it is justly represented as "*seared*with a hot iron, [1 Timothy 4:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Tim 4.2)." Indeed, if it were not thus with them, how could they go on so cheerfully as they do, in an open course of sin, or in a willful neglect of God?

With many also there is a partialconscience. They discern what is wrong in others, but not in themselves. Or they notice some of their own evils, but not others. *Herod*would not violate his oath; but he would murder a prophet, [Matthew 14:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 14.9). The *Pharisees*would not put into the treasury the money that was the price of blood; but they would persist in persecuting the innocent Jesus even unto death, [Matthew 27:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 27.3-6); [Matthew 27:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 27.20).

Such a conscience have many among ourselves: it would be clamorous if they were to commit some flagrant enormity; while *it bears no testimony at all against secret lusts, or against any evils which are sanctioned by an ungodly world.*

With some also there is an erroneous conscience. Paul "thought he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus, [Acts 26:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 26.9)," and would have stood condemned in his own mind, if he had not labored to the uttermost to extirpate the Christian name. Our Lord has told us that many would "think they did God service by killing" his faithful followers, [John 16:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 16.2). Doubtless there are many who, both in civil and religious actions, are instigated by (what we may call) a good principle, while yet a clearer view of their duty would represent those actions in a very different light.

There is also with many a scrupulous conscience. They both do and forbear many things from a sense of duty, when the things themselves are altogether indifferent in the sight of God. Thus it was with those who were afraid to eat foods that had been offered to idols, or who observed the times and seasons that had been prescribed in the Mosaic law, [Romans 14:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 14.2-3); [Romans 14:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 14.5-6). Superstition indeed is less common in this age: yet wherever the mind is tinctured with it, there will arise many occasions of condemnation or acquittal in a man's own mind, when *the sentence passed is altogether founded in an ignorance of Christian liberty, or Christian duty*.

***~~Hence it is evident that conscience may condemn when it ought to acquit, and acquit when it ought to condemn.~~***

***~~The sentences of conscience, however, is always just, when it accords with the Holy Scriptures—~~***

The Scriptures are an infallible standard, to which everything may be referred, and by which its quality may be determined. In order therefore to ascertain whether the testimonies of conscience are just, we would try them by this touchstone. We should learn from the sacred volume:  
what are the leading features of conversion;  
what is essential to the Christian character; and  
what, though wrong in itself, will consist with real integrity. When we have thus attained an adequate knowledge of the rule of duty, and our conscience judges by that rule in estimating our conduct—then we may safely acquiesce in its determinations, and conclude it to be right, whether it acquits or condemns.

There is, however, and ever must be, more credit due to its sentence when it condemns, than when it acquits; because, in *condemning*, it may have respect to any single act, and found its sentence on that, without the smallest danger of mistake. But, in *acquitting*, it must comprehend the whole circle of a Christian's duty, and testify that, on the whole, there is no allowed deviation from it. Here therefore is great scope for error; insomuch that Paul himself, though he knew of no allowed evil in himself, would not be too confident respecting his state; but committed himself to the judgment of a merciful and gracious God, [1 Corinthians 4:33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 4.33), [34](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Corinthians 4.34).

To procure a just attention to its voice, we proceed to show,

***~~II. The benefit and comfort of having its testimony in our favor—~~***

Nothing is more terrible than an ACCUSING conscience:

***~~1. The testimonies of an accusing conscience are a source of present distress—~~***

When God gives it a commission to scourge a man, it executes the office with great effect. How did it increase the troubles of Joseph's brethren, [Genesis 42:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 42.21); and torture the soul of the unguarded *Darius*, [Daniel 6:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan 6.18-20); and appal the impious *Belshazzar*, so that his knees smote one against the other, [Daniel 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan 5.6). How did it make *Felix*tremble on the seat of judgment, [Acts 24:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 24.25); and *Judas*actually to become his own executioner, [Matthew 27:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 27.5). When it operates with a just and beneficial influence, it will force the most obdurate to cry out with anguish, [Acts 2:37](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 2.37); [Acts 16:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 16.29-30), and the most confident to weep with great bitterness, [Luke 22:62](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 22.62).

Many among ourselves perhaps have felt its stings, until we have groaned in our spirit, and even "howled upon our bed," anticipating, and almost tasting, the bitterness of Hell itself, [Hebrews 10:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 10.27).

***~~2. The testimonies of an accusing conscience are a pledge of eternal misery—~~***

When conscience is enlightened, it sees innumerable abominations in the heart: and when sanctified, it feels an utter abhorrence of what it does see. But yet "God is greater than our hearts" both in respect of penetration to discover sin, and of holiness to hate it. He "knows all things" that have been done amiss, and that too, with all the particular aggravations that have attended every omission of duty, and every commission of iniquity. Not our *actions*only, but our very *thoughts*, are "sealed up in his bag," to be brought forward against us at the last day, [Job 14:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 14.17). The present testimonies of conscience are a previous and preliminary sentence, declaring now upon few and partial grounds, what God himself will hereafter declare on a complete review of our whole lives.

We do not say indeed that there is no room for repentance. God forbid: *the accusations of conscience are the voice of God within us, calling us to repentance*: and the most guilty conscience that ever tormented the soul of man, may in an instant be purged by the blood of Jesus! [Hebrews 10:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 10.22) and [1 John 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 1.7). But if conscience summons us to its bar, as God summoned Adam and Cain to answer for their conduct, [Genesis 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 3.9); [Genesis 4:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 4.9-10), its decisions shall be ratified in the day of judgment, unless they be reversed through penitence and faith in Christ. What it "binds on earth, shall be bound in Heaven; and what it looses on earth, shall be loosed in Heaven."

On the other hand, nothing is a richer blessing than a GOOD conscience:

***~~1. The testimonies of a good conscience are a source of unspeakable comfort—~~***

Paul tells us that he found this to be a well-spring of happiness within him, "Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conduct in the world, [2 Corinthians 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 1.12)." Indeed, such a testimony is a continual feast to every one that enjoys it. Having an inward witness of our own sincerity, we may "assure our hearts before God, verse 19," we may "have boldness of access to him with confidence, [Ephesians 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 3.12)," we may "ask of him what we will, and it shall be done unto us, verse 22."

Such a testimony inspires a "confidence towards God" in everything that relates to our present or future welfare; it fills the soul with a "peace that passes all understanding," and "a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory." How desirable then is it to be able now to appeal to God, like Job, "You know that I am not wicked, [Job 10:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 10.7);" or with Peter, "You know all things; you know that I love you, [John 21:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 21.17)." And how blessed to say with Hezekiah in a dying hour, "Remember now, O Lord, I beseech you, how I have walked before you in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in your sight, [Isaiah 38:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 38.3)."

***~~2. The testimonies of a good conscience are a pledge of eternal happiness—~~***

The witness of our conscience is, in fact, the witness of the Spirit of God. Some think these are two distinct witnesses: but perhaps this is the more just view of the matter. [See Discussion on [Romans 8:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.16).] for it is the result of a divine illumination, whereby we discern the agreement of our experience with the Word of God, and of a divine communication, rendering that agreement an occasion of joyful confidence.

What then can this be but *a foretaste of that bless which shall be consummated in Heaven!*In this view these divine communications may be considered as "the first-fruits of the Spirit," and "the pledge of the Spirit;" because they are, as it were, the beginnings of Heaven in the soul, and they assure to us a complete and everlasting possession of it. Even in the day of judgment itself this holy confidence will remain, [1 John 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 4.17); those who possess it now, will go forth with joy to meet the bridegroom, "they will stand before him with great boldness," and, assured of their relation to him, will exclaim, "This God is our God for ever and ever!"

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How careful should we be in every part of our conduct!~~***

*Everything we do is written in the book of God's remembrance;* and our own consciences will hereafter, if not now, attest the truth of God's testimony. How anxious then should we be, that every day and every hour would record something good, rather than what will distress us in the day of judgment! Let us then beg of God to "put truth in our inward parts." Let us exercise ourselves day and night to keep a "conscience void of offense both towards God and man [Acts 24:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 24.16)." Let us say with Job, "My heart shall not reproach me as long as I live, [Job 27:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 27.6)."

***~~2. How attentive should we be to the voice of conscience!~~***

Conscience, if we would listen to it, would tell us many plain and wholesome truths, [Romans 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 2.15). *If we would submit to its reproofs, it would keep us from much evil, and lead us safely to Heaven.*Let none of us then stifle it, or bribe it, or despise it: but let us rather get it well informed, and cherish with care its beneficial admonitions. Let us carefully conform ourselves to its dictates, [Acts 23:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 23.1)," and "judge ourselves, that we may not be judged of the Lord, [1 Corinthians 11:31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 11.31)."

***~~3. How thankfully should we bathe in the fountain of Christ's blood!~~***

There is not a day or an hour wherein conscience does not contract some defilement: nor is there a probability of pacifying it, but by continual applications to "the blood of sprinkling." Let us then rejoice that there is "a fountain opened for sin and impurity;" and let it be our care day and night to *cleanse ourselves in it from every fresh contracted stain*. If we neglect this, "our mind and conscience will be defiled, [Titus 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Titus 1.15);" but if we "abide in him, we shall have confidence in expectation of his appearance; nor shall we be ashamed before him at his coming, [1 John 2:28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 2.28)."

***~~#2451~~***

***~~FAITH IN CHRIST ENJOINED~~***

***~~[1 John 3:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 3.23)~~***

"This is his commandment: That we should believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ."

Some Christians, from a mistaken zeal for the Gospel, are ready to associate the idea of legality with the very mention of the term "commandment;" forgetting that the commandments, if obeyed from love, are of the very essence of the Gospel; obedience to them being:  
its necessary fruit,  
its appropriate end,  
its highest glory.

John had as ardent a love to the Gospel, and as vigilant a jealousy for its honor, as Paul himself, yet does he lays the greatest stress on an obedience to the commandments, saying, in the very words before my text, "Whatever we ask, we receive of God, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight." But the very Gospel itself is here presented to us under that character, as much as "love" itself, which is the sum and substance of the law: "This is his commandment, That we would believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment." In fact, the Gospel would be particularly endeared to us under this character. And, that it may be so, I will set before you:

***~~I. The duty here commended to us—~~***

If faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is a grace bestowed, [Ephesians 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 2.8). [Philippians 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 1.29), so is it also a duty enjoined. We are commanded of God,

***~~1. To receive Christ as he is revealed in the Gospel—~~***

He is spoken of as the person foretold from the beginning of the world:  
"the Seed of the woman,"  
"the Seed of Abraham,"  
"the Shiloh,"  
"the Son of David,"  
the Virgin's child,  
the Messiah that was to come.

It is our bounden duty, after comparing the history of the New Testament with the records of the Old, to receive him under this character.

But he is said also to sustain certain offices corresponding with the typical representations of him under the Mosaic economy.

He was to be "a Prophet like unto Moses".

He was to fulfill and execute also all the services of the Priesthood.

He was to "sit on the throne of David," as King over his Church and people.

In all these views, then, we must inspect his pretensions: and from all that we read concerning him, we must be convinced, that in him were all these offices united; that he is indeed:

the Prophet, who has revealed to us the mind of God;

the Priest also, that has offered himself a sacrifice for the sins of men;

and the King, who will bring the whole world under his scepter, and reign unto the very ends of the earth.

In a word, he is declared to be a Savior, the only Savior of our fallen race. And, from all that he wrought for the bodies of men in healing all manner of diseases, and from the effects which he produced also upon their souls, both during his sojourning on earth, and after his ascension to Heaven—we must thankfully acknowledge him under that endearing character; and confess him, as the Samaritan converts did, "This is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world! [John 4:42](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 4.42)."

***~~2. To depend upon him for all the blessings which he is commissioned to bestow—~~***

A *speculative acknowledgment*of Christ, without a *practical application*to him for all the benefits of his salvation, will be of little use. The offices he sustains have respect to the necessities of fallen man: and under a sense of our need, we must look to him to fulfill those offices for us.

Is he a Prophet? We must look to him to instruct us by his word and Spirit, and to guide us into all truth.

Is he a Priest? We must rely on the atonement which he has offered for us, and seek, through his prevailing intercession, all those good things which he has purchased for us, and which God, for his sake, is ever ready to bestow.

Is he a King? We must put ourselves altogether under his government and protection, and live only for the glory of his great name.

We must renounce every other hope, and rely on him for everything; looking to him, and to him alone, as "our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, and our complete redemption." In a word, "the life which we now live in the flesh, we must live altogether by faith in the Son of God, who has loved us, and given himself for us."

But, in contemplating this duty, I would call your attention particularly to,

***~~II. The authority by which it is enjoined—~~***

***~~If faith in Christ were merely conceded to us by permission, it were a great and invaluable gift—~~***

Suppose the Israelites, when perishing with thirst, to behold the rock stricken, and the water gushing out like a river; would they need any *command*to drink of its refreshing streams? Would not a *permission*be amply sufficient? Methinks, if it had even been prohibited, they would have broken through the commandment, to slake their raging thirst. At all events, we are sure they would not have needed a command to avail themselves of the opportunity afforded to them.

Or let us take another supposition. We are told that there is an impassable gulf between Heaven and Hell. But, suppose there were a bridge built over it, and an open door made into the highest heavens, and a free permission given to the fallen angels to escape from their dungeons, and to resume the thrones of glory from which they fell; how long, do you think, would they continue in their abodes of misery? Would so much as one of them need a command to leave his sad abode, and to return to the enjoyment of his original felicity?

Then why would not a *permission*suffice for us? A permission is given us, "him who comes to me, I will never cast out! [John 6:37](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 6.37)." And what do any of you need more? Do you not need the waters of life as much as Israel ever did? And are you not under the same condemnation with the fallen angels? Yes, truly: the only difference between them and you is this: that they are already suffering the punishment of their sins; but over you the penalty is suspended, and only waiting the command of God to fall upon you to the uttermost. Surely, then, there should be in you the same concern to escape from the wrath to come; and a bare permission would suffice to induce you to embrace the salvation set before you in the Gospel.

***~~But what shall we say, if God has recommended to us this salvation in a way of advice?~~***

This he has done: "I counsel you," says our Lord, "to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see! [Revelation 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 3.18)."

By the prophet Isaiah, too, it is said, "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare! [Isaiah 55:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 55.1-2)."

Such was the advice given by Peter to those who, on the day of Pentecost, inquired, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" He bade them "repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of their sins," which, he assured them, would be conferred on all who followed his advice, [Acts 2:37-39](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 2.37-39). And what was the effect? No less than three thousand persons instantly complied, and embraced with thankfulness the offered benefit.

So the *jailer*, when Paul gave the same advice to him in answer to a similar inquiry, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.' Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized." [Acts 16:31-33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 16.31-33)

***~~But, alas! more is necessary; and therefore God, in tender mercy, has enjoined it in a way of positive command—~~***

Yes, this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ. We are averse to this humiliating way of salvation, and, if we dared, would eternally reject it. But God sent us this solemn warning, that, "if we believe in Christ, and are baptized in his name, we shall be saved. But that if we believe not, we shall assuredly and eternally be damned! [Mark 16:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark 16.16)." And even after we are made, in a measure, willing to embrace this salvation, we are apt to put it from us, under an idea that we are unworthy of it, and that it were presumption in us to appropriate to ourselves so rich a blessing.

But God silences at once all objections of this kind. He leaves us not at liberty even to deliberate upon the subject. He tells us plainly, that "as long as we continue in unbelief, we are in a state of condemnation, and that his wrath abides on us! [John 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 3.18); [John 3:36](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 3.36)."

And he further informs us, that there is but "one way of salvation, [Acts 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 4.12)," "one only foundation" whereon to build our hopes, 1 Corinthians 3:11; and that the embracing or rejecting of that Savior will determine our eternal state; since "there is life in Christ alone; and he alone who has the Son of God, has life; whereas he who has not the Son of God, has not life, [1 John 5:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 5.11-12)," nor can by any possibility obtain it in any other way than by faith in him, [John 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 14.6).

Behold then, brethren, what the duty is, that is here enjoined; and know, that it will be at the peril of your souls to disobey it.

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

***~~1. What a merciful command this is—~~***

Suppose that God had commanded us to make compensation for our past iniquities, and to earn his favor by a course of perfect obedience; who among us could ever have entertained the slightest hope of mercy at his hands?

Or suppose that he had required us to do so much as one single act that would merit his favor? Who among us must not have been cast down in utter despair?

But *all that he requires is that we would receive thankfully what he offers freely*. So far as respects everything for the removal of our guilt, or for the providing of a perfect righteousness for us, all that is wrought for us by the Lord Jesus Christ, and is offered to us as a free gift from God.

O beloved, what an unspeakable mercy is this! O! never turn your backs on this salvation, for "how shall you escape, if you reject it?" It is precisely such as your necessities require; and, if you will but accept it as the free gift of God to your souls, it shall be yours forever!

***~~2. What inconceivable benefit will flow from your obedience to it—~~***

In the words following my text there is another command connected with it; namely, that "we should love one another, as he gave us commandment." But this, in fact, is the fruit, of which the other is the root. *True "faith will invariably work by love*[Galatians 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 5.6);" so that, not only will *salvation*be secured to us by faith; but *holiness*also, in all its sublimest branches, will be wrought in us.

Those who object to salvation by faith, do so under an apprehension that it will leave us regardless of moral duties. But I ask, where is love found in any degree in comparison with that which is produced by faith? Where, since the foundation of the world, was holiness in all its branches seen, in comparison with that which shined forth in the Apostles and in all the primitive saints? I say then, that in this view the exercise of faith is of inestimable value.

But who shall declare the benefits resulting from it in the eternal world? Who shall make known to us all that is implied in "obtaining the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory! 2 Timothy 2:10." My dear brethren, be thankful that these blessings are yet offered to your acceptance; and pray earnestly to your God, that you fall not short of them through unbelief.

***~~#2452~~***

***~~THE MUTUAL INDWELLING OF GOD AND HIS PEOPLE~~***

**[1 John 3:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 3.24)**

"Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us."

There is, in the Epistles of John, a most remarkable *simplicity*, insomuch that he seems to speak truths level with the comprehension of a little child: yet is there in him a vast *profundity*of sentiment, which no common mind can fathom. Not that he establishes his points by labored argumentation. He does not offer himself to the bar of reason; but, conscious of his own inspiration, he requires the submission of human reason to his dictates.

In my text, he asserts truths of the deepest import; namely, the mutual indwelling of God in his people, and of his people in him; and the consciousness which God's people have of this mystery being realized in their own experience. These are things of which men in general have very little conception: but, on the authority of this holy Apostle, I will proceed to show,

***~~I. The exalted privilege of God's people—~~***

***~~The character of God's people is here declared, in very simple terms—~~***

"Those who obey God's commandments" is the person to whom the privilege belongs. Not that any man can keep them perfectly: but the true Christian does desire to fulfill them in their utmost extent; and, allowing for human infirmity, he does keep them uniformly, and without reserve. He would not exclude one command from the Decalogue, or contract its import in any respect.

But the commandments here more especially referred to, are those of faith and love. In the preceding verse these are particularly specified. "This is his commandment, that we would *believe*on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and *love*one another, as he gave us commandment." Now, certainly, these are the two commandments which, above all others, serve as a test, whereby to try the Christian character; and obedience to them is that by which the Lord's people are universally and exclusively distinguished. They are known by it universally: for there is not a Christian upon earth who does not live simply by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; or who does not love, with a peculiar and transcendent affection, all whom he supposes to belong to Christ. On the other hand, this character belongs to them exclusively: for there is no other person in the universe who so entirely relies on Christ, or who so pre-eminently regards the mystical members of his body.

***~~Of these it is said, that "God dwells in them, and they in him"—~~***

There is between God and them a union which does not exist in the whole world besides. Perhaps, the union of light with the air which it pervades, is the closest that will be found in nature: but, though the light pervades every particle of the air, and dwells in it, we cannot say that the air dwells in the light. But the indwelling of God and his people is mutual; he abiding in them, and they in him.

Of course, however, this must be understood, not as relating to the essential natures of God and man, but only to a mystical communion subsisting between them; God dwelling in them, in a way of vital operation; and they dwelling in him, in a way of implicit trust.

God has repeatedly promised that he will dwell in his people by his Spirit; enlightening their minds, sanctifying their souls, and filling them with heavenly consolations. In truth, this is the very office which the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the ever-blessed Trinity, sustains in the economy of redemption: and it is in this way that he applies to us all that the Lord Jesus has purchased for us.

We, on the other hand, in the exercise of faith and love, ascend, as it were, to Heaven, and deposit all our cares in the very bosom of our God: so that it is "not so much we that live, as Christ that lives in us [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 2.20);" "our life being hidden with Christ in God," and "Christ himself being our very life, [Colossians 3:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 3.3-4)."

I grant, that to a mere nominal Christian all this will appear little better than mystical absurdity, and enthusiastic jargon. But true it is, whether men will believe it or not: and, if its being incomprehensible by us is any reason for denying it, we must, on the same principle, deny the existence and operation of our souls within our corporeal frame. It is not on one or two insulated passages that this great mystery is founded: it is declared again and again, in terms too plain to be denied, and too numerous to admit of doubt, [John 6:56](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 6.56); [John 14:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 14.20). [1 John 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 4.16).

Nor is this a mere theory, demanding our assent: for my text further declares,

***~~II. The assured sense in which they possess this mutual indwelling—~~***

This mutual indwelling may be perceived and known: "it may be known," as the Apostle tells us, "by the Spirit whom God has given us."

***~~1. It may be known by the operation of the Holy Spirit within us—~~***

The Holy Spirit is given unto us as "a Spirit of adoption, whereby we are enabled to cry, *Abba, Father!*[Romans 8:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.15)."

He is given to us as a witness, to "witness with our spirits that we are the children of God, [Romans 8:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.16)."

He is given to us as "a seal, [Ephesians 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 1.13)," to mark us as God's property; and to produce such an impression on our souls, that we may know, and that others also may know, "whose we are, and whom we serve."

He is given unto us as "a pledge of our heavenly inheritance, [Ephesians 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 1.14)," that we may have already the foretaste of Heaven in our souls.

*Now, how can these operations proceed within us, and we not be conscious of them?* It is to no purpose to say that the world knows nothing about them: for our blessed Lord has promised, that "he will manifest himself unto us as he does not unto the world:" and it is by these very operations that he makes to us this glorious discovery: "Lord," said one of his Apostles, "why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?" Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him, [John 14:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 14.22-23)."

***~~2. It may be known by the very works which that Holy Spirit produces in us—~~***

David prayed, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me, [Psalm 51:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 51.10)." And in this sense we may understand our text: "We know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us;" that is, we know the cause by the effects.

Now, consider the effects, as before contemplated. We perceive not only the manifestations of God's love to us, but the drawing of our souls to him; so that in the habit of our minds we are going forth to him, and delighting ourselves in him.

Is this the fruit of nature? Can it have proceeded from any power, but that of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us? Will anyone see iron suspended in the air, and not refer it to the magnet? Be assured, when such an effect as this exists, we can trace it to no other source than the agency of the indwelling Spirit within us.

Again, the disposition to obey the commandments of the Lord, and especially the sublime commandments of faith and love—is this of man? is the desire from man? How much less, then, can the attainment be? No, truly: "it is God who works in us both to will and to do of his own good pleasure:" and when we have in ourselves the evidence that we are "keeping these commands," we may as well doubt who it was that formed the universe, as who the Author is of the work that has been wrought within us. We must say, "Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come, Corinthians 5:5."

***~~Permit me to impress this subject more fully upon you,~~***

***~~1. In a way of complaint—~~***

There is great reason to complain of the world at large, for deriding these things as wild enthusiasm, when they will not examine the grounds on which they are founded. I will grant, that, *never having experienced anything of the kind in their own souls, they can have no just conception of them*. But they might read the Scriptures: they might see what the inspired writers have spoken; and what was the recorded experience of the primitive saints.

If persons in a tropical climate were to deny the existence or properties of congealed water, it would be no proof at all that there are not mountains of ice, capable of breaking, by force, the largest ship. As well might children deny what their fathers have known by experience, as ignorant and ungodly men denounce as visionary what truly converted characters know to be true. To those, then, who with ignorant incredulity ask, Can such things be? I would answer, with Philip to Nathanael, "Come and see! [John 1:46](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.46)." Come to the Holy Scriptures, and you shall find them there: and come to God himself, in the exercise of faith and love; and you shall find the experience of them in your own bosoms.

***~~2. In a way of caution—~~***

There are two errors, against which I would most affectionately guard you all:  
the one is, against professing this assurance on inadequate grounds;  
the other is, against the maintaining of this assurance in an unhallowed way.

There are persons who conceive that God dwells in them, because they have had some dreams or visions to that effect. Satan himself is not capable of suggesting any more fatal delusion than this. And I must declare unto you, that he who builds his hopes on dreams or visions, will find his hope, and his religion too, no better than a dream or vision at last. It is from the Spirit whom God has given us, and not from a dream or vision, that we are to gather our saving interest in God: and I entreat you to satisfy yourselves with no evidences, but such as are plain, obvious, incontrovertible.

There are others who, professing to have God abiding in them, manifest a spirit altogether opposite to that which would result from a divine agency—a spirit of pride and self-preference, a spirit of moroseness and bigotry, a spirit of unwatchfulness and carnal security. The presumptuous boldness of these persons is perfectly appalling: one is shocked to hear such unfeeling language as will proceed from their lips, and to behold such unhumbled confidence as they will venture to express.

But I entreat you, brethren, never thus to pervert the Word of God, and never thus to abuse the sacred truths of his Gospel. Remember, I beg you, that whatever replaces a holy fear, is of the devil; and whatever leads you to neglect a continued watchfulness, is no other than a damning delusion!

***~~3. In a way of encouragement—~~***

A person under the influence of temptation will not be able to behold in himself those evidences, which yet, in his life, are visible to all. Such a one may find in this passage nothing but an occasion of self-condemning fear. He may say, 'I do not keep the commandments of God, and therefore I know that I have no part or lot in this matter: and "the very spirit that is within me testifies that I have not God abiding in me." ' But, my brethren, judge not yourselves too harshly. Do not suppose, that, because there are *imperfections*in your obedience, it is therefore not sincere; or because the Spirit shines not upon you in full luster, that you are still in the darkness. Be content, at present, to lack the consolations which God sees fit to withhold: and occupy yourselves with the pursuit of those things which, in God's good time, will serve to prove what at the present you cannot see. Endeavor, in humble dependence upon God, to keep the commands of faith and love. Look to the Savior, and live by faith in him: look to his peculiar people, and abound in all acts and offices of love to them. Look to the spirit and temper of your own minds altogether: and in the constant exercise of prayer seek the transformation of your souls into the Divine image.

Then, though you are not able to see that God is in you, a foundation will be laid for the future discovery of it: or, though it would still, for wise and gracious purposes, be hidden from you, you will have the benefit at a future day, when God will surely shine upon you, and "reward every man according to his works."

This is the advice given by the prophet, who says, "Let us acknowledge the LORD; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth! [Hosea 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 6.3)."

***~~#2453~~***

***~~GOD, AN EFFECTUAL HELP~~***

***~~[1 John 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 4.4)~~***

"Greater is He who is in you, than he who is in the world."

Considering the opposition made to Christianity in the apostolic age, it is surprising that it gained so speedy, so extensive, and so permanent a footing in the world. That its establishment was effected through miracles, there is no doubt: but *miracles, unless attended with a divine power to the hearts of the beholders, could effect nothing*.

The very raising of Lazarus from the dead served only to embitter the minds of many against him who had effected it. That which gave energy to the word, and caused it to work effectually for the conversion of men, was the power of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, after that men had embraced the Gospel, every possible method that Satan could devise was used to turn them from it: but millions maintained their steadfastness, even to the end. For, as John informs us, "greater was He who was in them than he who was in the world."

This truth being still as important as ever, I shall,

***~~I. Confirm the assertion as relating to former times—~~***

**"Great," it must be confessed, "is he who is in the world"—**

"Many false prophets," even while the Apostles were yet living, "had gone out into the world:" and great were the efforts which they made to turn men from the Christian faith.

Our blessed Lord had foretold that such persons would arise, and that their efforts would be productive of incalculable injury to his Church and people. "Many prophets shall arise, and deceive many." "For there shall be false Christs, and false prophets, who shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you beforehand, [Matthew 24:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 24.11); [Matthew 24:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 24.24-25)."

In accordance with this prediction, we find that "the faith of many was overthrown, [2 Timothy 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Tim 2.18);" "whole houses were subverted, [Titus 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Titus 1.11);" and great multitudes were "turned back unto perdition, [Hebrews 10:39](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 10.39)." At a future period we expect still more extensive ravages of the flock, through these wolves in sheep's clothing, [Matthew 7:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 7.15); for the Spirit speaks expressly, "that in the latter times some will depart from the faith; giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their conscience seared with a hot iron, [1 Timothy 4:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Tim 4.1-2)."

But it is Satan, in reality, who is the great agent in all these transactions: and the men who are more immediately engaged, are his instruments. In "these false apostles, these deceitful workers, who transform themselves into the Apostles of Christ, it is Satan himself transformed into an angel of light! [2 Corinthians 11:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 11.13-15)." It is "the prince of the power of the air, even the evil spirit himself, who works in all those children of disobedience, [Ephesians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 2.2)."

***~~But "greater far is He who is in the Christian"—~~***

"The strong man armed keeps his palace, and his goods, for a time, in peace. But there is a stronger one than he, who comes upon him, and overcomes him, and takes from him his armor wherein he trusted, and divides his spoils, [Luke 11:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 11.21-22)." He rescued millions from the dominion of that wicked one, and preserved them from the assaults of their cruel adversary. And "greater He still is," than that wicked fiend, and all his adherents.

He is greater in wisdom: for though the "devices" of Satan are inconceivably numerous, and "his wiles" beyond all conception subtle—yet he discerns them all, and knows how to counteract and defeat them all.

He is greater also in power: for though Satan is "an angel that excels in strength," and has millions of wicked spirits, like unto himself, acting in confederacy with him, and under his special control, He who sits in the heavens laughs him to scorn; and says to him, "Hither shall you go, and no further!" Earnest as Satan's desire was to destroy Job, he could effect nothing, until permitted by God; and then could he not move a hair's breadth beyond his appointed bounds. Not even the herd of swine could he destroy, until he was liberated from the restraint which our Lord's superior power had imposed upon him.

That we may improve the assertion for our own use, I will,

***~~II. Confirm it as applicable to the present day—~~***

***~~The same wicked spirit works mightily in the world at this time—~~***

Various are the instruments which Satan employs, and incessant are his exertions to destroy the souls of men.

He works by open infidelity. It is well known what efforts he has made throughout the whole of Europe, and with what prospects of success; insomuch that his agents boasted that they would soon crush our blessed Lord, and extinguish his religion. And in our own country, if the legal authorities had not interposed to uphold the laws, there is reason to fear that impiety and blasphemy would have filled every corner of our land.

He works too, by secret discouragements. In every place, he assaults the souls of those who are desirous of being liberated from his dominion. He would persuade them that they are, on some ground or other, excepted from the general invitation to accept of mercy. They are not among the elect; or are too unworthy to obtain God's favor; or have committed the sin against the Holy Spirit—so that their day of grace is passed. All such suggestions are for the purpose of effecting that in individual characters, which, by infidel principles, he endeavors to accomplish on the community at large.

He works also by subtle false doctrines; mutilating and debasing the true Gospel, by confounding it with the law, and introducing into it terms subversive of its fundamental principles. It matters little to him how he effects his purpose: If it is by a bold denial of all religion, or a desponding rejection of offered mercy, or a perversion of the Gospel under a pretended zeal for good works, he equally attains his end. Therefore he varies his assaults according to the diversified characters of men, if by any means he may draw them from Christ, and finally effect their eternal ruin.

***~~But a mightier power is in us—~~***

God is still with his redeemed people; and still works in them, "mighty to save."

*He is greater to instruct, than Satan is to deceive.*

The deepest of Satan's devices he can unveil, to the very weakest of his people; and can overrule them for the accomplishing of his own gracious purposes towards them.

Satan hoped, by destroying the Messiah, to subvert his kingdom: but God made it the very means of establishing that kingdom. It was "by death that our Lord overcame him who had the power of death;" and on the very cross he spoiled principalities and powers, "triumphing over them openly in it."

***~~He is greater also to uphold, than Satan is to cast down.~~***

The efforts which Satan made to intimidate the Apostle Paul were such as appeared sufficient to daunt the strongest mind: but observe how God enabled his servant to triumph in every assault: "We are troubled on every side—yet not distressed: we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; 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."

***~~He is greater too to save, than Satan is to destroy.~~***

Satan would have "sifted Peter as wheat:" but God would "not suffer his faith to fail, [Luke 22:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 22.31-32)." In the Epistle to the Church of Smyrna, it is said, "Behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that you may be tried: and you shall have tribulation ten days, [Revelation 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 2.10)." Mark how Satan is here restrained. If he could have had his own will, he would have cast, not "some," but all; not "into prison," but into Hell! Not for "ten days" but forever! No "tribulation" short of that, would satisfy his malignant mind. But wherever he, or his emissaries, deal proudly, our God is above them; and the very means which he uses for our destruction will God make use of for the promoting and effecting of our salvation.

***~~Two questions, we may suppose, you will be ready to ask:~~***

***~~1. How shall I know by which spirit I am moved?~~***

This question is easily answered from the preceding context. We are bidden to "test the spirits, whether they are of God." And this shows the propriety of suggesting the question before us. We have also the answer given: "Hereby you know the Spirit of God: every spirit who confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God: and every spirit who does not confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is not of God, verse 1-3."

Here, then, is a plain test, by which the matter may be tried. Whoever, or whatever, would keep you from a total surrender of your souls to Christ, is from the devil: and whatever would lead you to it, is from God. All the false prophets before spoken of are antichrists: for "there are many antichrists, [1 John 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 2.18);" and whatever be the particular line they adopt, their object is the same; namely, to keep you from glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ. But whatever means our God is pleased to use, his object is that Christ would be glorified in us. This is the matter contested between God and Satan; as Paul also explicitly declares: "The god of this world has blinded the minds of those who do not believe, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, would shine unto us. But God, who commanded light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ! [2 Corinthians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 4.4); [2 Corinthians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 4.6)."

This exactly accords with the testimony of John, and completely answers the question that has been proposed. Know then, that if *infidelity*would pervert you, or despondency *discourage*you, or *self-righteousness*deceive you—they have "the mark of the beast upon them, as clear and visible as the sun at noon-day. The object of them all is, to keep you from Christ.

But, whatever leads you to Christ, to believe in him, and serve him, and glorify him, you need no other evidence of its being from God. Reject therefore, with abhorrence, every anti-Christian spirit: and receive with gratitude every motion which bears upon it the character and impress of your heavenly Father.

***~~2. How may I secure the final victory?~~***

This also it is easy to answer: "You are of God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you, than he who is in the world." "They were of God," and relied altogether upon him: and therefore they overcame. You do the same; and the victory shall be yours also.

Never will God forsake those who trust in him: never will he allow Satan to "pluck one of them out of his hands." He may leave them to endure many conflicts: but he will be with them, and support them with great might, and make them "more than conquerors" over all their enemies.

No one need to be discouraged on account of his weakness; for "God will perfect his own strength in their weakness." "His hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor is his ear heavy, that he cannot hear." Still is he as able, and as willing, to save his people as ever, "nor shall one of his little ones ever perish!"

Look on your enemies then, my dear children, (that is the meaning of the word translated "little children:" it does not here refer to age or stature, but is a term of endearment, and is so used by our Lord himself to his disciples, [John 13:33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 13.33);) and say to every one of them, "Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain! [Zechariah 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 4.7)." Only "be of God;" and all the powers of darkness shall fall before you, and "Satan himself be bruised under your feet shortly! [Romans 16:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 16.20)."

***~~#2454~~***

***~~THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH, AND THE SPIRIT OF ERROR~~***

***~~[1 John 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 4.6)~~***

"This is how we know the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error."

In matters of eternal importance, every man must think for himself. *We should take nothing upon trust; but bring to the test of Scripture the doctrines we hear, and the persons who profess to instruct us in the mind of God*. This may appear presumptuous, in persons who have not made theology their peculiar study: but it is not presumptuous in anyone who has the Scriptures in his hands, and a Divine Instructor to apply to.

It was to the Church at large, and not to any particular person, that John said, "Beloved, believe not every spirit; but try the spirits, whether they be of God." Even in the apostolic age, "many false prophets had gone out into the world:" and certainly *there are many at this day, who, while they profess to preach the Gospel, hold forth an extremely erroneous standard of truth and duty*. But the Gospel itself affords us a sufficient test, whereby to try whatever is set before us.

Moreover we should feel the same jealousy respecting ourselves, and use the same precautions in estimating our own character. There is "a spirit of truth;" but there is also "a spirit of error:" and the two may easily be mistaken for each other; and, through that mistake, a most erroneous judgment be formed of our conduct. To keep you from any such mistakes, I will show,

***~~I. The different spirits by which men are actuated—~~***

***~~There is, in some, "a spirit of truth"—~~***

In some there is a simplicity of mind, that desires nothing but what is right and true. They are open to conviction: they will weigh with candor whatever is set before them: they will not knowingly harbor any prejudices or biases. They take pains to acquire knowledge: they, in particular, search into the fountain of all knowledge, the book of God: and, *conscious of their need of divine instruction, they will look up to God for the teachings of his Spirit, and readily submit to whatever they find to be his revealed will*. They are like Cornelius, who, though a heathen, hesitated not to send for Peter, who was a Jew, and to receive without gainsaying all that that divine instructor was commissioned to reveal.

***~~There is, in others, "a spirit of error"—~~***

There is in some a perverseness of mind, which, instead of desiring truth, loves rather paradox and disputation. There is in them an inaptitude to receive instruction. They have certain principles in their mind, which bias them on all subjects; and they have a certain pleasure in being singular. Things which are plain and obvious to others are not so to them, because their minds are fertile in supplying objections: to find which, they will travel far out of their road; and, having found them, they will lay a far greater stress on them than such trifling difficulties can in any way deserve. Hence, on almost all subjects, they are at issue with their nearest friends, unless indeed they have prevailed to draw others into the same vortex with themselves.

But, as these imagine themselves to be influenced by a very opposite spirit, it will be proper for us to inquire,

***~~II. How we are to discriminate between them—~~***

As in natural substances we may, by a chemical process, discover of what they are compounded; so may we, by the application of certain tests, find how far the foregoing ingredients enter into the composition of our minds. In the context, two tests are proposed; namely, the world, and the Gospel; and by these "we may know" the two different spirits which we have been considering.

***~~1. Take the WORLD, then, as a test—~~***

If we have "the spirit of truth," there will be a readiness to see and acknowledge the vanity of all things here below. *The whole world, and all that it contains, will appear to us lighter than vanity itself*. Its *views*will appear erroneous in the extreme: its *habits*, altogether contrary to the mind of God. Eternity will be taken into the account in every estimate of the things of time; and everything be viewed with a direct reference to that.

On the other hand, let the world be brought as a test to one who is blinded by "the spirit of error;" and how manifest will be the delusion under which he is laboring! He cannot see that the world is so vain or so mistaken as enthusiasts imagine: there is nothing so evil in its ways: its pursuits are highly rational; its pleasures altogether innocent; its friends and votaries in a state of acceptance with God. Nothing in it is to be condemned, except its excesses and its crimes. In a word, as the Pharisees "derided our Lord" when he spoke of covetousness, because "they were covetous," so the man who is led by "the spirit of error" shuts his eyes against the plainest truths, and *will admit nothing which thwarts his own worldly and carnal inclinations*.

***~~2. Take the GOSPEL as a test—~~***

This is still more calculated to try the hidden dispositions of the soul. If we are actuated by a spirit of truth, *we shall receive as little children, whatever God has spoken in his word*. We shall not dispute against it, because it does not accord with our pre-conceived opinions; but shall rather form our opinions from it, than presume to sit in judgment upon it. The deepest truths which are there revealed, will not offend us. It will be no stumbling-block to us, to find that God himself has become incarnate, and died upon the cross under the guilt of his creatures' sins. Our only inquiry will be, Is this revealed? If it is, then is it true, whether we can understand it or not.

Nor shall we be averse to the way of obtaining salvation simply by faith in Christ; because, if it is pointed out as the only way of access to God, and the only means of obtaining blessings from him, then is it with all readiness and humility to be complied with, nor will a thought be allowed to rise against it. This is "the honest and good heart," which our blessed Lord commends as the proper soil wherein to sow the seed of life, and as the principle which we must cultivate with all possible care.

But far different will be the conduct of one who is carried away by "the spirit of error." The blessed Word of God to him is rather a field wherein to exercise and display his own ingenuity. Nothing is acceptable to him that does not commend itself to his reason: he sits in judgment upon everything, pronouncing this reasonable, and that unreasonable; and the great mystery of redemption, through the blood and righteousness of our incarnate God, he regards as foolishness. This is the spirit of Arians, and Socinians, and numberless others, who, *instead of receiving the sacred oracles with the simplicity of a little child, deal with them as they would with a merely human composition; receiving what they like, merely because it accords with their own views, and rejecting all the rest as erroneous and absurd*.

Thus by these tests we may distinguish "what spirit we are of." They call into action the hidden principles of the heart; and give occasion for the manifestation of them, in a way that is clear, and that admits of no doubt.

Let me now proceed to mark,

***~~III. The importance of distinguishing them aright—~~***

A just discernment of these spirits will enable us:

***~~1. To account for the conduct of others—~~***

It appears strange, at first sight, that a religion so worthy of God, and so suitable to man, as Christianity is, would not be readily received, and universally obeyed. How can it be, that its principles would be so generally controverted, and its practice so generally condemned? Is there any lack of evidence that the Christian religion itself is from God? Or, is there anything really unreasonable in a life of faith and holiness? No! the fact is, that the pride of human nature is averse to receive a free salvation; and the corruption of human nature knows not how to bear the restraints which the Gospel imposes on it. Hence the spirit of man rises against the Gospel itself; and either fashions it to a standard of his own, or rejects it altogether, as unworthy to be received.

Here then, at once, we see whence it is that worldlings continue worldly, and infidels retain their infidelity. They say in their hearts, "Who is lord over us? They hate to be reformed: "they hold fast deceit:" they shut their eyes against the light: they "cast God's Word behind them;" and say, in effect, "We will not have this man, the Lord Jesus Christ, to reign over us!" This explains that phenomenon which proves such a stumbling-block to Jews and Gentiles. They say, 'If your religion is so clear, whence is it that there is such a diversity of opinions respecting it?' The answer is, 'Among those who are humble and contrite, there is no difference as to any fundamental part of doctrine, or practice: and, if there be among others, it is because they are led away by a "spirit of error," and "blinded by the god of this world."

**2. To form a correct judgment of our own** **conduct—**

To attain a knowledge of ourselves, we must diligently mark our own motives and principles of action. *We see in others a bias; and we must observe how far there may be any undue influence upon our own minds*. If we will candidly examine ourselves, we shall see that, in ten thousand instances, there is a leaning to self, through the workings of pride, or self-interest, or passion; and that, to be perfectly impartial in our views and actions, is an attainment of great magnitude.

*To have no wish but to conform ourselves to the will of God, is a measure of grace that is but rarely found*; so rare is "a spirit of truth" in its full extent, and so prevalent "a spirit of error." Hence there is no man who has not occasion to humble himself for his defects; nor any who has not to watch continually against the deceitfulness of his own heart.

***~~Let me further IMPRESS this subject on your minds, by adding,~~***

***~~1. A word of caution—~~***

The persons who most need to have this subject brought home to their own hearts, are the most backward to bestow a thought upon it; so blinded are they by the very evil against which they ought to guard. But I would affectionately remind them, that confidence in error will not make error cease to be what it is; and that *a pertinacity in error may cause God to give them over to judicial blindness and hardness*. We read, that "God gives over some to a strong delusion, to believe a lie, that they may be damned, because they believe not the truth, but obey unrighteousness! 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12." Their "believing a lie" does not make it true; nor does its being "a delusion" prevent their being "damned" for yielding to it. O brethren! provoke not God so to abandon you; but beg of him to give you more simplicity of mind, and to put "truth in your inward parts."

***~~2. A word of advice—~~***

You know, that in natural substances there are a great variety of component parts, which are hidden from the natural eye; but which, as we have before hinted, may, by a chemical process, be brought to view. By the application of certain tests, the parts may be separated, and new combinations of them be formed.

In like manner, by the application of tests to your souls, you may discover the hidden principles of your hearts. See what it is to which your mind has an affinity: mark what it embraces; and what, on coming into contact with some other thing, it is disposed to relinquish. There are both "flesh and spirit" in the renewed man; and, by diligent observation of the way in which they are called into action, and of the degree in which they operate, you may ascertain your real character before God.

If the *world*drives out spiritual considerations, and more tenaciously occupies the mind—then you will see reason for self-abasement before God. If, on the contrary, the blessed truths of the Gospel readily fill your mind, and exclude the world—then have you reason for gratitude and thanksgiving. We are assured that "those who are after the flesh, mind and savor, the things of the flesh; but those who are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit." "Try then yourselves" by these tests, and "examine" carefully your state before God, [2 Corinthians 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 13.5) and again 1 Thessalonians 5:20; for, "if your own heart condemns you, God is greater than your heart, and knows all things; but if your heart condemns you not, then have you confidence towards God."

***~~#2455~~***

***~~THE LOVE OF GOD IN GIVING HIS SON FOR US~~***

***~~[1 John 4:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 4.9-10)~~***

"This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."

Of all the endearing characters that are given us of God, that by which he is designated in the words immediately preceding our text, is the most comprehensive and most glorious, "God is love." It might seem indeed that this appellation is ill-accorded with the sterner attribute of justice: but in the execution of his wrath against impenitent transgressors, his love to the whole creation appears, no less than in his dispensations of grace and mercy to the penitent. Even as the love of a judge towards the whole community appears in condemning a murderer, as much as in protecting the weak, or acquitting the innocent.

There is however one exercise of his love which infinitely exceeds all others; and that is, the gift of his only-begotten Son to die for us. This is the subject set before us in the text, and which the return of this day calls more especially to our remembrance.

Let us consider,

***~~I. The love of God as it is here exhibited—~~***

Instead of entering at large into the subject of our Savior's incarnation, we shall confine ourselves strictly to the consideration of the Father's love in the different steps of it, as mentioned in the text.

***~~1. How astonishing it is that God would desire the restoration of our souls to life!~~***

Why would he ever entertain such a thought as this? Could we profit him at all? Or would he suffer any loss by leaving us to perish? If he chose to have human beings to behold and participate in his glory, could he not in an instant call forth millions into existence, and communicate to *them*the blessings *we*had forfeited? Had he determined that we would never fall, and that he would impose on us a necessity to continue in our primeval state, we would have the less wondered at his love. But that he would foresee our fall, and yet determine to restore us; that he would behold us actually fallen, and yet pity us; that, when our first parents fled from him, he would follow them with invitations to accept of mercy; and that, when they shifted off all blame from themselves, and cast it eventually even upon God himself, he would still retain his desire to save them—how amazing was this love!

Had he proposed only to remit their punishment, and to annihilate their existence, this had been a wonderful act of love. But*to desire the restoration of such creatures to his favor, that they might live with him in glory for evermore, is truly such an exhibition of love as far surpasses the utmost stretch of our conceptions!*

How differently did he act towards the angels when they fell into sin! He never entertained a thought of restoring them [Hebrews 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 2.16); but, when man fell into sin, then, as if he himself could not be happy without us, he concerted with his eternal Son to deliver us, and to save us with an everlasting salvation! [Zechariah 6:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 6.13).

***~~2. How astonishing it is that he would send his beloved Son into the world to effect our salvation!~~***

What ways of accomplishing this object God might have found, it is not for us to say: but it is reasonable to believe that nothing less than the incarnation of his only-begotten Son could effect it. And how wonderful it was that he would ever adopt such a measure as that! that he would spare his only dear Son from his bosom, and send him into a world that was already cursed by sin! that he would send him to assume our very nature; to be "made in the likeness of sinful flesh;" yes, to be made in all points like as we are, sin only excepted!

However he might desire our recovery, it seems absolutely incredible that he would ever condescend to use such means to effect it: yet we are told that he actually did so; and that he sent, not an angel, not all the hosts of angels, but even "his beloved Son, into the world, that we might live through him, [John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 3.16)."

***~~3. How astonishing it is that, in order to accomplish our salvation, he would make His beloved Son an atoning sacrifice for our sins!~~***

For the honor of God's moral government, it was necessary that his hatred against sin would be made manifest, and that, if mercy were exercised towards fallen man, it would be only in a way that would consist with the rights of justice, and preserve the honor of God's broken law. This could only be done by a vicarious sacrifice, a sacrifice of equal value with the souls of all mankind. Such a sacrifice could be made by none but our incarnate God; who therefore assumed our nature, that he might expiate sin by the sacrifice of himself, and make himself "an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world." What love then was here; that God would send his only-begotten Son into the world for such an end as this! Had he sent him to instruct us by his doctrine and example, it would have been a stupendous act of love. But to send him on purpose that he might bear our sins in his own body on "the tree," and die in our stead, "the just for the unjust, to bring us to God"—this is a love that is utterly incomprehensible! It has heights and depths that can never be explored!

To confirm this view of our subject, we need only call your attention to that assertion of Paul, that "in this God commends his love to us;" and to that pious reflection of his, "He who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all—how shall he not with him also freely give us all things, [Romans 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 5.8); [Romans 8:32](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.32)." These passages abundantly prove, that as the gift of Christ to us was the fruit of the Father's love, so it was an instance of his love, that infinitely outweighs all else that he ever has done, or ever can do, for sinful man.

Let us now consider,

***~~II. Our love to God as put in competition with God's love to his redeemed people—~~***

It is evidently supposed in our text that some might be blind and impious enough to ascribe their salvation rather to the love which they bore to God, than to that which, of his own free and sovereign grace, he bore to them. Hence the Apostle says, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins!" It is indeed surprising that any man would ever entertain such an idea as this which the Apostle explodes: but experience proves, that there is no merit so great, but man will arrogate it to himself; and no tribute so just, but he will refuse it to his God. We proceed then to notice this false sentiment in a two-fold view:

***~~1. The erroneousness of it—~~***

Let us for a moment inquire, What is the state of fallen man? Has he of himself any love to God? So far from it, we are told, that "the carnal mind is enmity against God; and that it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed *can*it be, [Romans 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.7)." There is not any one thing relating to God which the natural man loves:  
not his perfections;  
not his word;  
not his ordinances;  
not his people;  
not his ways!

He is in his heart adverse to them all!

But it may be said that many are brought to love God at last. True, but how is this effected? by any power in man? or by any previous good inclination in man? No! "It is God who gives us both to will and to do, of his own good pleasure, [Philippians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 2.13);" it is "he, and he alone, that makes us to differ," either from others, or from our former selves. We neither have anything, nor can have anything, but what we receive from him, [1 Corinthians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 4.7). How then can that which we receive from God, be the cause or ground of his conferring it upon us?

The text, it is true, speaks of God's sending his Son into the world to die for us: and it may be thought, that no one would ascribe that gift to any merit of his own. We grant it: but, if men do not ascribe to their own merits the gift of a Savior, they ascribe to their own merits the gift of salvation itself: yes, exceeding vehemently do they arrogate to themselves this honor. And when they are constrained to acknowledge, that in their unregenerate state they have done no good works to deserve salvation, they will maintain, that God has respect to *some good which he has foreseen in them*, and makes some natural or acquired excellence in them the reason and the measure of his favor towards them.

But we can scarcely conceive any expressions more strong than those by which God cautions his people against this vain conceit. Hear what he said respecting it to his chosen people the Jews, [Deuteronomy 7:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 7.7-8); [Deuteronomy 9:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 9.4-6) and [Ezekiel 36:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 36.22); [Ezekiel 36:32](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 36.32). Hear also what Jesus said to his own immediate disciples, who had certainly as good ground for boasting as any of us can have, [John 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 15.16). Hear further what John says in a few, verses after our text, and which is applicable, not to one age or people, but to the saints of God in every age, *"We love him, because he first loved us*! verse 19."

But indeed it is the voice of Scripture from one end to the other, [Jeremiah 31:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 31.3). [Ephesians 2:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 2.8-9). 2 Timothy 1, 9, that "God has mercy on whom he will have mercy, [Romans 9:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 9.11); [Romans 9:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 9.15-16)," and that "there is a remnant according to the election of grace, [Romans 11:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 11.5)." To be making this truth a constant subject of our ministrations, as some do, is highly injudicious; but, when it comes fairly in our way, *we must maintain it as necessary for the abasing of man's pride, and for the exalting of God's honor and glory*.

***~~2. The impiety of it—~~***

God is a jealous God: his very "name is Jealous, [Exodus 34:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 34.14)," and "his glory he will not give to another, [Isaiah 42:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 42.8). Now the great end for which he has redeemed man, was the advancement of his own glory. Paul, in the space of a few verses, repeats this almost to satiety, if we may so speak, [Ephesians 1:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 1.5-7); [Ephesians 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 1.9); [Ephesians 1:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 1.11-12); [Ephesians 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 1.14); [Ephesians 3:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 3.10-11). But to ascribe the gift of a Savior, or of salvation, either in whole or in part, to our love to him, is to rob him of his glory; and to establish a ground for glorying in ourselves, when he has declared, "that no flesh shall glory in his presence! [1 Corinthians 1:27-29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 1.27-29)."

Now, in reference to ourselves, we are backward to acknowledge that there is any great sin in this. Let us then transfer our thoughts to the fallen angels, and contemplate them as acting in this manner. They have sinned, as we have: and are as incapable of restoring themselves to the Divine favor, as we are. Let us then suppose God to say, 'I will send my beloved *Son*into those regions of misery, to bear their punishment, and to expiate their guilt! And I will send my *Holy Spirit*into their hearts, to change their natures, to renew them after my image, and to fit them for my presence.'

Suppose, when God, of his own sovereign grace and mercy had done this, that those wicked fiends would arrogate the glory to themselves, and say, 'God has saved us, because he foresaw what holy dispositions we would exercise, and how richly we would merit his favor.' What would we think of them? Would we not say, that their guilt was augmented ten-fold; and that the punishment they might expect would be proportionably severe?

Where then is the difference between them and us? What have we, more than they, to merit the Divine favor? Or what can we have more than they, except it be given us from above? Know then, that if God would burn with indignation against them for such pride and ingratitude, so will he burn against us, if we refuse to give him the glory due to his name. If Herod was made a monument of wrath for accepting from others a tribute due only to his God, then much more shall we, if we, reversing what he has spoken, shall presume to say, "Herein is love, not that God loved us, but that we loved him, and earned by our love a saving interest in his favor."

***~~We conclude with some suitable advice:~~***

***~~1. Contemplate frequently this love of God to you—~~***

The angels are not savingly interested in the wonders of redemption as we are, and yet are ever "desiring to look into them." Shall we then be regardless of the wonders of redemption? Shall we not search into them; and meditate upon them; and speak of them; and glory in them; and make them "all our salvation, and all our desire?" Shall we not especially consecrate to the contemplation of the wonders of redemption this season which has been set apart by our Church for that express purpose? O make not this a time for carnal feasting, but for holy meditation, and for delight in God!

***~~2. Get your hearts filled with love to him—~~***

If our love is not the *cause*of his love to us—then it nevertheless is the *consequence*of his love to us. Of this, none can entertain a doubt. Who that is in the smallest degree impressed with the Savior's love to us, does not see the reasonableness of that awful denunciation, "If any man loves not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha! [1 Corinthians 16:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 16.22)." Yes, on whomever that curse may fall, we must all acknowledge the justice of it; and in the day of judgment, when it shall be yet more awfully denounced on the enemies of Christ, there will not be a saint or angel in the universe who will not add his *Amen*to it. *O let us now muse on his love to us, until the fire of Divine love kindles in our hearts, and we speak with our tongues the high praises of our God!*

***~~3. Seek to abound in love to each other—~~***

This is the improvement which the Apostle suggests in the words following our text, verse 11. In the love of Christ to us is both the reason and the model, for our love to each other. Was his love to us unmerited? We also should freely exercise love even to the evil and unthankful. Did his love lead him to forego the glory and felicity of Heaven, and to submit to the accursed death of the cross for us? Such should be our love to our fellow-creatures: there would be no measure of labor or self-denial which we would not willingly exercise for the good of others; yes, even to the laying down of our life for them, [1 John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 3.16).

Here then we see the proper duty of this Christmas season: search out the poor, the sick, and the afflicted, that you may administer to them the consolations they stand in need of: and especially exert yourselves to see what you can do for the souls of men: This is the work that will most assimilate you to Christ, and will best prove the sincerity of your love to him.

***~~#2456~~***

***~~CHRIST THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD~~***

***~~[1 John 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 4.14)~~***

"And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world."

Were it announced to us, in a time of war, that the enemies of our country were vanquished, that those who had menaced us with utter destruction were all taken captive, and that we might henceforth enjoy an honorable and lasting peace; our first inquiry would be: What ground is there for crediting the report? If we were assured, that several persons, who had been present at the battle and had seen the captive enemies, were sent by the conqueror on purpose to make known to us the glad tidings, we would be filled with transports of joy, and congratulate one another on the glorious event.

Such tidings, and thus authenticated, we have to declare unto you; not indeed in reference to an earthly enemy, but in reference to our great adversary, the devil; whom Christ, our Almighty Deliverer, has subdued. The Apostles were sent by their victorious Lord to proclaim the news: and they have come to us, affirming that they were eye-witnesses of the truths which they have been commissioned to declare. They acknowledge, indeed, that "Satan bruised His heel; but they affirm, that He bruised Satan's head." Satan so far prevailed as to have him crucified: but by his very death our blessed Lord overcame him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; yes, "on the cross itself he triumphed openly over that wicked adversary, and spoiled all the principalities and powers of Hell;" and in his ascension "he led captivity itself captive."

But that we may ascertain more correctly the nature and truth of their testimony, we shall show,

***~~I. What evidence we have of the fact reported in the text—~~***

It would divert us too far from our subject to enter into the question of the credibility of the Apostles; suffice it to say, that, as they had no possible inducement to deceive us, so they have never, on any occasion, betrayed the smallest wish to deceive us. Their veracity is unimpeached, and may fully be relied on.

But, it may be asked: Were they themselves well-informed on the points whereof they affirm? We answer, They saw the things which they attest: they did not receive them from the report of others, but were assured of them by visual demonstration. They saw all which they affirm concerning Christ:

**1. They saw** **His personal glory—**

Others, even his bitterest enemies, beheld him as a man like unto themselves; but some of his Apostles had visual proofs of his Godhead: they *saw*him transfigured on Mount Tabor, his face shining brighter than the meridian sun, and his garments all illumined by the radiant effulgence of his Deity; and they *heard*the Father's voice from Heaven attesting him to be his only, his beloved Son, [Matthew 17:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 17.2). [Mark 9:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark 9.2); [Mark 9:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark 9.7). This vision was given to them for their more perfect satisfaction: and they record the circumstance in proof, that what they reported concerning him they knew to be true, [John 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.14). [2 Peter 1:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 1.16-18).

**2. They saw** **His matchless perfections—**

Not they only, but his very enemies, were astonished at his *wisdom*, and constrained to confess, that "never any man spoke like him." His *power*and goodness were alike manifest in the authority which he exercised over diseases, devils, and the very elements. Hence, on different occasions, his disciples expressed their full conviction that he was the promised Messiah, the Savior of the world: "We believe and are sure that you are that Christ the Son of the living God! [Matthew 16:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 16.16). [John 6:69](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 6.69)."

**3. They saw** **His shameful death—**

His crucifixion was seen by all: but there were some circumstances connected with his death, which tended very strongly to corroborate the opinion which his disciples had formed of him. The effusion of blood and water from his wounded side in two distinct streams, particularly impressed them with the idea, that he died to cleanse men, not only from the *guilt*, but also from the *power*and *pollution* of sin, [John 19:34-37](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 19.34-37) with [1 John 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 5.6). And the prodigies preceding and following his dissolution were such, that the Centurion who attended the crucifixion exclaimed, Truly this was a righteous man, this was the Son of God! [Matthew 27:54](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 27.54). [Mark 15:39](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark 15.39). [Luke 23:47](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 23.47).

**4. They saw** **His triumphant resurrection—**

At the precise moment of his resurrection, none were present except the soldiers who were placed to guard his tomb: but within a few hours he was seen by several of his disciples: and for the space of forty days he appeared to them on a great variety of occasions, [Acts 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 1.3). By these manifestations of himself, the incredulity of the Apostles was overcome, [John 20:24-28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 20.24-28); and much stress was laid upon them by the Apostles in confirmation of their word, [1 Corinthians 15:3-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 15.3-8). [Acts 10:40-41](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 10.40-41).

**5. They saw** **His glorious ascension—**

Many were permitted to behold this glorious event: and this, together with the descent of the Holy Spirit whom Christ had promised to send down, convinced the disciples, beyond a possibility of doubt, that Jesus was the Christ. From this time, (the time of the Spirit's descent,) the Apostles began to preach Christ as the Savior of the world: and they constantly founded their testimony upon the fact of their having been eye-witnesses of everything that they declared, [Acts 2:32-33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 2.32-33); [Acts 2:36](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 2.36). Indeed, such stress did they lay on this circumstance, that, in choosing a successor to Judas in the apostleship, they took care to have one who was on a par with themselves in this particular, [Acts 1:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 1.21-22); and, in speaking of Christ, they dwell on this circumstance with most triumphant satisfaction, 1 [John 1:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.1-3).

It was for the purpose of qualifying Saul to bear the same convincing testimony, that the Lord Jesus appeared personally to him in the way to Damascus, [Acts 26:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 26.16); and, when his ministry was undervalued on account of his supposed inferiority in these respects, he triumphantly appealed to his opposers, "Am I not an Apostle? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? [1 Corinthians 9:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 9.1)."

If then such a number of faithful witnesses, all concurring in the same testimony, and all qualified to give their testimony from a personal inspection of the things attested, can establish any truth whatever, we must confess that the fact asserted in the text is established beyond the possibility of doubt, and that "God the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world!"

The fact being proved, we proceed to show,

***~~II. For what end we bear our testimony respecting it—~~***

To set forth Christ as the Savior of the world was the one labor of all the Apostles. The same also is *our*blessed employment; and we make that our constant theme, or, at least, the sum and substance of our discourses:

***~~1. That you may have just views of the Father's love—~~***

We behold the goodness of our God in everything around us: but not all the creation can exhibit it in so bright a view as the cross of Christ: there, even in the face of a crucified Jesus, shines all the glory of our God. Love, in particular, is there portrayed in its most endearing colors.*The gift of God's only dear Son to die for ungodly sinners, was the most stupendous effort of love that ever was, or can be, exhibited!*[John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 3.16). [Romans 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 5.8)., verse 9, 10. It is greater love than was ever shown even to the angels themselves, [Hebrews 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 2.16); and, while it brings us nearer to the throne of God than they, [Revelation 7:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 7.11), it will furnish us with everlasting songs in which they can never join, [Revelation 5:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 5.9-10).

***~~2. That you may renounce all erroneous methods of seeking acceptance with him—~~***

If this glorious truth had never been revealed, we might well have made the same inquiries as Balak, "With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

[Micah 6:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 6.6-7)." But what room is there for such inquiries now? Do we despise this unspeakable gift of God? Or do we conceive that we shall be able to establish a firmer foundation for our hope, than that which is laid in the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ? O reject not the offered mercy of your God! Say not, 'The Savior of the world shall not save me.' This is what you do, in fact, say, when you go about to "establish any righteousness of your own, [Romans 10:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 10.3)."

To guard you against so fatal an error, Paul testified with all the energy he could express, [Galatians 5:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 5.2-4); and we also testify, that there is no other foundation to be laid, [1 Corinthians 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 3.11), nor any other name to be trusted in, [Acts 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 4.12), but that of Jesus Christ.

***~~3. That you may embrace the Lord Jesus with your whole hearts—~~***

View him as sent down from Heaven, even from the bosom of the Father: view him as dying in your place and stead, [Isaiah 53:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 53.4); [Isaiah 53:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 53.6). [1 Peter 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Pet 3.18); view him as saving a ruined world. Can you forbear to love him? Can you refrain from seeking a saving interest in him? Are you not ready to cry out, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Hosanna in the highest!" Behold him, I say; admire him; adore him; trust in him, "cleave unto him with full purpose of heart;" "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus your Lord."

Alas! you are but too little affected with his love; and need to be reminded of it continually: "we determine, therefore, with God's help, to know nothing among you but Jesus Christ and him crucified," and to *set before you his dying love, until it constrains you to love him, and to live to him*.

***~~Conclusion—~~***

Hear once more our testimony:

We testify, that Christ is indeed the Son of God, even "Emmanuel, God with us."

We testify, that the one errand on which he came, was to save a ruined world.

We testify, that he has done all that was necessary for the salvation of our souls; and that "he is both able and willing to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him."

O compel us not to complain, as he did: "We testify of that we have seen, and you receive not our witness, [John 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 3.11)."

But let us behold you inquiring after him, until you can say with the Samaritan converts, "we have seen (and heard) him ourselves, and believe that He is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world! [John 4:42](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 4.42)."

It is true, you cannot now see him, as the Apostles did, face to face; but by faith you may "see him who is invisible:" and if only you behold him now by faith, you shall one day see him, as you are seen, and "know him, as you are known."

***~~#2457~~***

***~~THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTER OF A CHRISTIAN~~***

***~~[1 John 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 4.16)~~***

"We have *known*and *believed*the love that God has to us."

Never was there a truth so deep, so comprehensive, so endearing, conveyed in so short a space as that immediately following our text, "God is love." It is engraved on the face of universal nature: the heavenly bodies, in their various courses, proclaim it: the earth, with all its productions, declares it: the human race, in particular, both in the frame of their bodies and the faculties of their souls, unanimously attest it. Every work of God's providence displays it; and every word of his grace in Scripture.

Even the judgments which he threatens, and those which he executes, must be traced to love as their source; for though, as it respects the individuals that suffer, whether men or devils, he shows only his displeasure; yet,*as justice executed on criminals is mercy to the community*, so is the punitive justice of the Deity an act of love to the whole intelligent creation.

But as glorious as this truth is, it is but little known: the revelation which was designed to illustrate and confirm it, is lightly regarded. And those things which incessantly engage the admiration of angels, are scarcely considered by men as worthy of the slightest attention.

Some there are however who know how to appreciate this truth. While it is overlooked by the wise of this world—it is known, believed, and loved, by every true Christian, whatever be his condition or attainments in all other respects: if he is low and illiterate, he yet has a just apprehension of it in his mind; and if he is great and learned, he values this above all his other knowledge.

From the words before us we shall be led to show:

***~~I. The distinctive character of the Christian—~~***

***~~The love referred to in the text, is that which God manifested in the gift of his dear Son to die for us—~~***

In the context, the Apostle particularly directs our attention to this point, verse 9, 10. He elsewhere declares, that the Father's love to our ruined race was the motive that induced him (if we may so speak) to send his Son into the world, [John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 3.16); and another Apostle refers to that event as the brightest exhibition which God himself could give of his love to man, [Romans 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 5.8). Great as many of his bounties are, this infinitely excels them all.

***~~The true Christian knows and believes this love—~~***

Professing Christians may *talk*of it with accuracy, according to the statement given of it in the Scriptures; but it is the true Christian alone who justly apprehends it. The light of professing Christians, like that of the moon, is inoperative, uninfluential. But the genuine Christian's light is like that of the sun: it diffuses a genial warmth through the soul, and causes every grace to flourish and abound.

Were it sufficient to say, "I believe," then all who repeat the Creed would be believers; and there would be no room for that question of our Lord, "When the Son of man comes, shall he find faith upon the earth?" But to exercise a *living*faith is a very distinct thing—this is peculiar to the true Christian: he knows and believes the love which God has exercised towards us: he "believes it" as the foundation of all his hopes: he "knows it" as the source of all his joys.

But that we may not deceive ourselves, we proceed to show,

***~~II. How we may know whether that character is formed in us—~~***

If a man knows and believes that anything of a very interesting nature, whether good or evil, has befallen him, he cannot fail of being, in some measure at least, suitably affected with it. Now, if we have known and believed the love that God has to us, we must of necessity have been filled:

***~~1. With wonder and admiration—~~***

This subject has excited universal wonder through all the hosts of Heaven: how then can it fail to astonish us, if we truly know it and believe it? Did the Apostle John express such wonder at our adoption into God's family, as to say, "Behold, what manner of love is this with which the Father has loved us!" Was Paul so overwhelmed with astonishment at the idea of the Gentiles being admitted into the Church as to exclaim, "O the depths!" And shall not we be amazed at a miracle of mercy that is infinitely more stupendous, that has a depth and length and breadth and height that surpass the conception of men or angels? What are all other gifts in comparison with the gift of his only dear Son? "Having not spared him, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things!

Know then, that, if you have never been lost in wonder at this "unspeakable gift," and at the unsearchable riches of grace and love contained in it; yes, if this is not in a measure your daily experience, you have never yet attained the Christian character: whatever you may have professed, or however you may have lived—*you have yet to learn the first great lesson in the school of Christ*.

***~~2. With love and gratitude—~~***

Men in general speak of the great mystery of redemption as a common thing; and will repeat the Creed, or the truths contained in it, with as much indifference, as if the Gospel were nothing but "a cunningly-devised fable." We might live with them for years, and never once hear them speak with rapture on this glorious theme. 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 love of Christ," if truly known and believed, will "have a constraining efficacy, to make us live for him who died for us."

The moment we feel it aright, we shall inquire: How can I requite it acceptably? What shall I render to the Lord for all these wonders of love and mercy? Contracted as our views of this mystery may be, "we shall count all things but loss and dung for the excellency of the knowledge of it." It will be the one subject of our meditations, and the one theme of our praise!

***~~3. With a desire to know our own personal interest in it—~~***

The man that has no fears or jealousies about his interest in the love of God, has no just conception of it at all. He may descant learnedly on the Scriptures, but he knows nothing of the mystery contained in them. To be in suspense and doubt whether we are accepted in the Beloved, is to a true Christian more painful than the severest bodily suffering could be. On the other hand, to be able to say, "Christ has loved *me*and given himself for *me!*" "My Beloved is mine, and I am his;" this is a very Heaven upon earth! And when the Christian can adopt this language, and feel "the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Spirit," "his soul is indeed satisfied as with marrow and fatness:" he cares for nothing, and desires nothing besides: created objects lose all their luster, when once he has thus beheld the Sun of Righteousness shining in his glory.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who have not this evidence within them—~~***

There can be no difficulty in making the foregoing inquiries. But it is a fearful thing to find on examination that we have not the grace of God in us. O do not think lightly of the distinction that has been pointed out—for it will form a ground of distinction in the day of judgment, and determine our abode either in Heaven or in Hell! 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10.

Remember, too, that you will in that day be wholly without excuse. Others may say, 'It was my misfortune rather than my fault that I did not know and believe the love of God in Christ Jesus; for I never had it faithfully declared unto me.'

But to *you*there has been no lack of instruction to enlighten, no lack of evidence to convince you: so that your ignorance and unbelief involve you in the deepest guilt! [Hosea 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 4.6). [2 Corinthians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 4.4). [Hebrews 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 2.3).

O do not continue in such a state as this! but pray that "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation may be given to you, and that the eyes of your understanding may be enlightened, [Ephesians 1:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 1.16-18)," that "you perish not for lack of knowledge."

***~~2. Those who can adopt the language of our text—~~***

If you can with truth declare that you have known and believed the love of God, then we must say to you: "Blessed are you; for flesh and blood has not revealed this unto you;" but "God has shined into your hearts to give it unto you." Be thankful for this distinguishing mercy: and seek to "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

Paul, after preaching the Gospel twenty years, "did not account himself to have attained, but still desired to "know Christ in the power of his resurrection, and in the fellowship of his sufferings." Do then press forward, and emulate the angels who are incessantly "desiring to look into these things." Make not the love of God a matter for speculation, but for admiration and praise. It is that which will be the subject of your songs in the eternal world; let it therefore now inflame your souls with gratitude, and animate you to unremitting diligence in the service of your God. Strive to exercise love to him, seeing that he has shown such love to you!

***~~#2458~~***

***~~GOD IS LOVE~~***

***~~[1 John 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 4.16)~~***

"God is love!"

The character of Jehovah is drawn in a great variety of expressions in Holy Writ: He is represented as *great*and *good*, and *just*and merciful, and by every other attribute that is worthy of his Divine Majesty. But, in the words before us, which are twice repeated in this chapter, all his perfections are concentrated in one abstract idea, as if they were all but one, and that one was "love."

Now, there is no light in which men so rarely conceive of the Deity as this. In truth, it is more as an object of terror than of love that he is viewed at all, especially by the generality; the desire of their hearts being, for the most part, like that of the Jews of old, "Make the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us!"

Let us, however, collect our minds for the contemplation of the subject before us, while I endeavor to exhibit God in the character which is here ascribed to him, and to show you that "he is wholly and altogether love."

***~~I. God is love in all the perfections and attributes of his nature—~~***

***~~His WISDOM is a loving wisdom—~~***

It is love, concerting measures for the communicating of his own nature and blessedness to creatures that would be formed for this very end. It was for this end that he created myriads of holy angels in Heaven. It was for this end that he formed the earth; and placed upon it beings endowed with faculties capable of knowing, loving, serving, and enjoying him. *He would have been equally happy and glorious, though no creature had ever existed to behold his glory, or participate his bliss. As he was eternally self-existent, so he would have been eternally self-sufficient. Nor was it possible for any creatures, however numerous or exalted, to add anything to him.*

But, from the fullness of love that was in him, he determined to form creatures susceptible of all the blessedness which he had ordained for them: and in the execution of this office his wisdom engaged with great delight.

***~~His POWER is a loving power—~~***

This also was love, putting forth all its energies to accomplish the things which wisdom had devised. No other object had it in view, than the adapting of all things to their proper ends, that nothing might be lacking to any creature in the universe; but that everything, from the highest archangel to the basest insect, might, according to its capacity, enjoy a fullness of bliss. The whole inanimate creation, the celestial bodies which move in their orbits, and this terrestrial globe with all its diversified accommodations, are all subservient to this end; and all evince, that the power which called them into existence was only a modification of love.

***~~His HOLINESS is a loving holiness—~~***

This also was love, making known to his creatures what was his mind and will, and showing them the precise path in which they must walk, in order to enjoy the happiness which he had ordained for them. On their conformity to him their happiness must, of necessity, depend: and God, in order that no creature might be at a loss to know his will, proclaimed it to them, and enjoined the observance of it as a law; thus constraining them to seek their own happiness, not from self-love only, but as an act of obedience to him.

***~~His JUSTICE is a loving justice—~~***

This enforced the law with sanctions; with a promise of eternal life, if it were obeyed; and with a threatening of eternal death, if it were transgressed. And what was this, but love, shutting up his creatures to a necessity of preserving the happiness for which they were formed; and rendering it, as might have been supposed, impossible that they would ever decline from it?

If these provisions have failed in producing the blessedness for which they were designed, that, as we shall see presently, makes no difference in the design of God, or in the real character of all the Divine perfections. They all had one object in view, and all were exercised for one end; and all, if justly viewed, were *love*—love in the first conceptions; and love operating for the happiness of all, in whose behalf those conceptions had been formed, and those powers had been called forth into activity.

We will yet further trace the same blessed character,

***~~II. God is love in the dispensations of his grace—~~***

Hitherto we have seen God as showing kindness to his creatures in a state of innocence: but now we must contemplate him as acting towards them in their fallen state. And, O! what love will now be opened to our view! View him in,

***~~1. The gift of his only-begotten Son—~~***

When all the purposes of his grace towards us had been frustrated by man's transgression, what, O! what did love suggest for our recovery? "He sent his only-begotten Son into the world, to stand in our place and stead;" and to "die," he "the just, for us the unjust," that he might restore us to God, in a way consistent with all the perfections of the Deity! This wonderful act is, in the former part of this chapter, traced to the very source of which we speak: "In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. 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."

Our blessed Lord also teaches us to regard the love of God as the one source of this unspeakable gift, [John 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 3.10). And Paul speaks of Jehovah himself referring to it, as the most stupendous display of his love that ever was, or ever could be, exhibited to fallen man: "God commends his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us! [Romans 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 5.8)."

***~~2. The gift of his Holy Spirit also—~~***

***~~In vain would Christ himself have died for us, if the Holy Spirit also had not come down to reveal that Savior to us, and, by the mighty working of his power, to draw us to him.~~***

But shall the Spirit be lacking to us? No! the very same love which sent the Lord Jesus Christ into the world to redeem our souls, sends the Holy Spirit also, to *apply*that redemption to us: so that here is a concurrence of all the Three Persons of the Godhead in this labor of love; each occupying a part in this mysterious work; and contributing, according to their respective offices, to effect this great salvation.

Say, brethren, *whether it is possible ever to comprehend the heights and depths of this love? No, truly, it is altogether incomprehensible, far exceeding the utmost conceptions of any finite capacity.*

***~~3. The gift of his ordinances—~~***

This, it is true, appears as nothing, in comparison with the gifts before-mentioned. But yet, methinks, it should by no means be overlooked. For the ordinances are indeed the golden pipes by which the golden oil is conveyed to us from the two fore-mentioned olive-trees, in which all fullness is treasured up for us! [Zechariah 4:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 4.11-14). It is by stated ordinances that you are gathered together to hear the Word of God, and to receive the communications of his grace: and it is by the appointment of an order of men to minister in holy things, that you derive advantages for the instruction of your souls in divine knowledge.

True, indeed, ministers are but earthen vessels: but the treasure which they convey to your souls is that which you would have but little leisure or inclination to search after for yourselves. Say, brethren, have not some of you often come to the house of God merely to observe a form which common decency required, and yet been so favored as to find there "the *pearl of great price*," in comparison with which all earthly things are as dross and dung? And say, whether you have not reason to adore the love which has provided for you such means of grace, such advantages for glory?

But on these things it is needless to insist, because they carry their own evidence along with them.

The same may be seen,

***~~III. God is love in the whole administration of his moral government—~~***

Here, doubtless, through our self-love, we are less apt to see the love of God. But it really exists; and to a humble mind it is as clearly visible, in the execution of his *judgments*, as in the dispensations of his *grace*.

***~~Let the nature and end of God's law be first considered—~~***

We have already said that *his law was a transcript of his mind and will; and that its proper use was to show to all the intelligent creation how God was to be served, and their own happiness secured*. We have also already shown that the sanctions which were added to this law had the same tendency; namely, to secure the observance of it to those who were left at liberty to obey or disobey, as they would feel disposed. And all this, we conceive, will readily be acknowledged to have been the fruit of love.

***~~Now, the law itself being approved, the enforcement of God's law must partake of the same character—~~***

As for those who suffer the penalty of transgression, as millions both of angels and men do at this moment in Hell; and as millions who are yet unborn will, it is to be feared, to all eternity; we readily grant that they cannot enter into the subject before us.

The men who suffer for transgressing human laws are ready to entertain hard thoughts, both of the laws themselves, and of those who enforce them. But they cannot be considered as competent judges: they are partial; and their self-love blinds them. *The community at large, who reap the benefit of the laws, see their excellence of those laws; and are thankful that they live under the protection of laws, wisely enacted, justly executed, and impartially enforced*. There is not, in any civilized nation upon earth, a considerate man who does not account it a rich blessing to have his life and liberty and property secured against the assaults of rapacious robbers and blood-thirsty murderers. And the very persons who violate the laws, and for their transgressions pay the forfeit of their lives, might have received as much benefit from the laws as others, if they would themselves have yielded subjection to them: so that, while suffering the penalties of transgression, they have no reason to complain of the laws; but only of themselves, for having wantonly and wickedly transgressed them.

Now thus it is with those who are suffering the vengeance of everlasting fire for their violations of God's law. The enactments themselves were intended for their benefit; and the penal sanctions would have conduced to their comfort, as much as to the comfort of any other person in the universe—if they would have yielded obedience to them. It is their own fault that they have brought out evil from good; and rendered that an occasion of misery, which was intended by God to be a source of bliss. Of themselves they may complain; but of God's laws they must speak with unqualified approbation and gratitude.

If a doubt exist on this point, let any man ask himself, how he would like to live in any place where the authority of all laws, human and divine, was set aside, even for the space of three days? Who would not, long before the expiration of that time, be crying out for the domination and government of equal laws?

I say then, that, as the law of God was made equally for all, and all may receive equal benefit from it—then all ought to regard it as the fruit of love; and to honor it in their hearts, as "holy, and just, and good."

It is possible that because in the present state of the world, far more are lost than saved—some may object that God has loved the few at the expense of the many. But though this is the case at present, there will, at no distant period, be multitudes far more numerous than all that have already existed; and "they will all be righteous," from the least to the greatest of them.

If Israel, in the space of about two hundred years, multiplied from seventy-six to two million, when so many efforts were made to destroy them; how shall they not multiply during the millennium, when the command "Increase and multiply," shall meet with no impediments; and when life will be so prolonged, that a "person dying a hundred years old will appear" to have been cut off under "a judicial curse?"

Carry on this annual augmentation, not for ten or twenty years, but for a thousand years; and you will clearly see that the numbers who have lived previous to that day will bear no proportion to those who shall then come upon the earth; and, consequently, that the number of those who will perish will bear no proportion to that of those who shall be ultimately saved.

But, if the objection were true as to the comparative numbers of those who shall be saved, and of those who shall perish, I would still say, that this would not at all invalidate the declaration in my text.

The law is equally good, even though every transgressor of it would perish; and the loss of every soul must be ascribed, not to any lack of love in God—but to the wicked obstinacy of man, who will not avail himself of the salvation which God has offered him.

Before there existed a creature in the universe, God was love: and after he had created both angels and men, he still continued love—and love he will be, when he shall judge the world. One of the most painful considerations, which will corrode the minds of those in Hell, will be, that it is love that condemns them, love that punishes them, and love that consigns them to the fate they have deserved! Yes, God's love to the whole universe demands their ruin. For supposing only that God would from this moment promise impunity to the transgressors of his law, where is there one who would not find a speedy relaxation in his efforts to obey it, and a consequent diminution of his happiness? But sinners cannot be so received. *If God would admit to his bosom the violators of his law, the enemies of his Son, and the despisers of his grace—then Heaven itself would cease to be a place of happiness; and God himself (I speak it with reverence) would cease to be an object worthy of our esteem.*But these things cannot be, because "God is love".

***~~Let us then learn from this exalted subject,~~***

***~~1. What should be the disposition of our minds towards God—~~***

Is he love in all his diversified perfections, and in all his mysterious dispensations? Surely then we should love him, and see nothing but love in all his ways. No commandment of his would ever be accounted grievous; but we would fly, like the angels themselves, to obey the very first intimation of his will.

As for any difficulties or dangers that may lie in our way, they should only be regarded as opportunities afforded us to show our love to God, and our zeal in his service.

When trials of the most afflictive nature arise (for "we are all born to trouble, as the sparks fly upwards!"), we must bear in remembrance, that *they are sent by a God of love, and that they are nothing but blessings in disguise*. We must remember, that "the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons, [Hebrews 12:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 12.6-8)"

We know that our own children do not appreciate our motives, while they are suffering under our displeasure, or when restraints are imposed upon them for their good. We must be content, therefore, to *consider the darkest of God's dispensations as fruits of his love*; and must feel assured that however "clouds and darkness may be round about him, righteousness and justice are the basis of his throne." In a word, we must ever bear in mind, that God is deserving of all our love; and we must endeavor to love, and serve, and glorify him, with every faculty we possess.

***~~2. What should be the disposition of our minds towards others?~~***

This is the point particularly insisted upon in the former part of this chapter; and, indeed, it is founded upon the very truth before us: "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one who loves is born of God, and knows God. He who loves not knows not God; for God is love, verse 7, 8."

And in another place, the Apostle yet more expressly deduces from it the lesson I am inculcating: "Beloved, if God so loved us—then we ought also to love one another, verse 11."

Let me then call you, brethren, to be "imitators of God as dear children [Ephesians 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 5.1)." And in what would you so much wish to resemble him as this? To have your every act, your every disposition *love*—what could more tend to the perfection of your nature, and the happiness of your souls, than this?

*In truth, love, if carried to its due extent, would make a Heaven upon earth.* O! cultivate it, my brethren, from your inmost souls; and, to whatever extent you have carried it, learn to "abound more and more."

Yet do not mistake the proper offices of love. It is not necessary that love would always be exercised in a way of approbation, or in a way that shall be pleasing to those who are the objects of it. God corrects his children, and is displeased with them when they act amiss. Just so, you also may manifest your displeasure in a way of correction towards those who are under your authority, when the occasion fairly calls for it. But *love must be your governing principle in all things; and its influence must regulate your whole life*. It must show itself in the suppression of everything that is selfish, and in the exercise of everything that is amiable and endearing. You must show it, by "bearing all things, believing all things, hoping all things, and enduring all things."

O that I knew what to say, that would prove effectual for this blessed end! This I will say, that by this disposition you must be known as God's children; for, if you possess it not, whatever else you may possess, you are in heart no better than murderers: "He who loves not his brother, abides in death: whoever hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him, [1 John 3:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 3.14-15)." On the other hand, "if you dwell in love, God dwells in you, and you in him." And, when you have this evidence of a transformation into God's image, then may you "have boldness in reference to the day of judgment."

Let it only be said, that "as He is—so are you in this world;" and we will predict, without fear of disappointment, that, as He is—so shall you be also in the world to come, "God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world.! verse 16, 17.

***~~#2459~~***

***~~THE BELIEVER'S RESEMBLANCE TO GOD IN LOVE~~***

***~~[1 John 4:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 4.16-17)~~***

"God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world."

That "God is love," is a truth that can admit of no doubt. The proper improvement to be made of this truth is also obvious: if he is love—then we should love him, trust in him, serve him, and submit to him. But there is one improvement of this subject which does not readily occur to the mind; it is this: If God is love—then we should be careful to imitate and resemble him.

Now this, though less obvious than the other deductions, is the point on which John principally dwells: "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one who loves is born of God, and knows God. He who loves not, knows not God: for God is love, verse 7, 8." The same line of argument he pursues in the words before us; showing that *our conformity to God in this great character of love, will be the measure of our nearness to him, and of our confidence before him*.

The words before us will lead me to mark,

***~~I. The resemblance which the believer bears to God in love—~~***

The Apostle having said that "God is love," adds, "As he is, so are we in this world." Now, in his essential nature we cannot resemble the Supreme Being; but in his operations we may. We must therefore mark,

***~~1. The operations of God's love—~~***

Love, though a simple idea, may be profitably considered under a threefold distinction:  
a love of *benevolence*,  
a love of *beneficence*,  
and a love of *delight*.

This distinction will lead us to make some discriminations which are of great importance to a full understanding of the subject.

"We say then of God, that his benevolence is universal. There is not a creature in the universe which he did not originally form for happiness; and to which he does not wish happiness, so far as it is capable of enjoying it. The fallen angels are gone beyond the reach of happiness; as are all those also who have brought upon themselves the final sentence of God's righteous indignation. But there is not a sinner whom he is not willing to save; and whom he would not save—provided he repented of his sins, and sought for mercy in God's appointed way. God has sworn to this; saying, "As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner; but rather that he turns from his wickedness, and live. Turn, turn, from your evil ways; for why will you die?" So far is God from desiring the death of a sinner, that "he wills that all would come to repentance, and live:" and when any will not repent, he takes up a lamentation over them; saying, "O that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways, [Psalm 81:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 81.13)." Our blessed Lord's weeping over Jerusalem, even after that it was given up to final desolation, gives us a just picture of Jehovah's mind towards the most abandoned of the human race, [Luke 19:41-42](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 19.41-42).

As God's benevolence is universal, so is his beneficence unbounded: "He opens his hand, and fills all things living with plenteousness." Of his *common bounties*all partake, in rich abundance: "He makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good; and sends his rain upon the just and upon the unjust." That greatest of all mercies, the gift of his only dear Son, was bestowed on all, as is the gift also of his Holy Spirit: for, as Christ died for all, [2 Corinthians 5:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 5.14-15), so does the Holy Spirit strive with all, [Genesis 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 6.3); there not being a good desire in the heart of any man, which has not been formed there by his all-powerful agency; and formed there in order to the bestowment of still greater good, if those first motions had been duly improved.

Nor would all the glory and blessedness of Heaven itself be withheld from a single human being, if only he would humble himself before God, and seek for mercy, and grace, and strength, in God's appointed way.

In respect of delight, however, God's love is *personal*and *partial*. It is not possible that a holy God would find delight in unholy creatures: for, "he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity," without the utmost abhorrence. "He is angry with the wicked every day!" And, though he would still have compassion on them if they would turn unto him, he contemplates with satisfaction, the judgments which their impenitence will bring upon them: "I will hide my face from them; I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith, [Deuteronomy 32:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 32.20); [Deuteronomy 32:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 32.22-23); [Deuteronomy 32:40-42](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 32.40-42). See also [Isaiah 1:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 1.24)."

*It is his faithful and obedient people alone, in whom he can take any pleasure*. On them he looks with sweet delight; as the prophet says: "The Lord your God in the midst of you is mighty: he will save: he will rejoice over you with joy: he will rest in his love: he will joy over you with singing! [Zephaniah 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zeph 3.17)." "As a bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so will your God rejoice over you! [Isaiah 62:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 62.5)." In a word, *he esteems true believers as "his peculiar treasure above all the people upon earth," and as composing the brightest jewels of his crown!*

***~~2. The resemblance which the believer's love bears to the operations of God's love—~~***

His benevolence also is universal, extending to all, whether friends or enemies, whether known or unknown: he has learned to "*bless*those who curse him, to *do good* to those who hate him, and to *pray*for those who despitefully use him and persecute him."

In his beneficence too, so far as his circumstances will admit of it, he is unbounded. The first object of his attention will doubtless be those of his own household, and his more immediate neighborhood. But he will not rest there; he will take an interest in the welfare of all mankind, so far as to pray for them, and to assist in conveying to them the blessings of salvation. He feels himself a debtor to the whole human race; and he pants to discharge his debt to the very utmost of his power.

But in the objects of his delight he is more confined and partial. He cannot possibly take those for his friends who are the enemies of God. He comes out from an ungodly world, and is separate from them. And this he does, not from any idea of his own superior goodness, but because he is afraid of being drawn into temptation; and because he is told on infallible authority, that "the friendship of the world is enmity with God!" He has a different *taste*from the world around him, and lives in a different element; so that it would be repugnant to his nature to occupy himself as they are occupied.

This is the ground upon which Paul interdicts all unnecessary communion with them: "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you

[2 Corinthians 6:14-17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 6.14-17)."

This shows clearly that the household of faith have a claim on his regards, beyond any other people upon earth, [Galatians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 6.10); and that, if his love is of a proper kind, the saints will have a decided preference in his estimation, and the "excellent of the earth will be all his delight, [Psalm 16:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 16.3)."

Such is the believer, while sojourning in this world. He is actuated by love, even as Almighty God is; so far, at least, as he is under the influence of divine grace. But his love varies in its exercise, as the love of Jehovah himself varies according to the circumstances or qualities of the object beloved.

To encourage this godlike disposition, I proceed to show,

***~~II. The blessedness of him in whom this resemblance is found—~~***

This is set forth by the Apostle in very exalted terms. But it must first be remembered that the believer is here supposed to "*live*in love:" he does not put it forth only on some particular occasions, but nourishes it habitually in his bosom, and maintains it as the constant habit of his mind. Now, where a person lives in love, he will be happy:

***~~1. In his enjoyment of the present—~~***

There is a mutual indwelling between him and God, "he dwelling in God," by faith and love; and "God dwelling in him," by the abiding influence of his Spirit.

But these expressions are far too weighty to be passed over with so slight a notice. The believer "lives in God!" We know what ideas we associate with a house in which we live:  
we regard it as our own,  
we go to it with freedom at all times,  
in it we expect to find whatever is suited to our daily necessities, and sufficient for our daily needs,  
we are at ease in it, and  
we feel ourselves secure from the tempests that rage around us.

There, after all the troubles and fatigues of life, we lay down to rest, and find that repose which fits us for the duties of every following day.

Now, as familiar as this illustration may appear, it is that which the Scriptures employ as peculiarly fitted to convey to our minds the truth which we are considering: "O Lord, you have been our *dwelling-place*in all generations! [Psalm 90:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 90.1)." "Because you have made the Lord, even the Most High, your *habitation*, no evil shall befall you! [Psalm 91:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 91.9-10)."

This confidence the believer feels:  
he looks to God as his God,  
he has access to him at all times,  
he goes to him without restraint,  
he "enters into the inmost chambers of God's divine perfections; hiding himself from every storm" which may beat around him; and finds in God that rest, and those supplies of grace, which his necessities require!

At the same time, "God dwells in him," as in his temple. Frequently does God designate his believing people by this gracious appellation; and promise them his presence, as in his temple of old: "What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people! 2 Corinthians 6:16."

Now this exactly marks the favors which God will grant to the truly loving soul. You remember that God abode in his temple by a visible symbol of his presence; that there, on the day of annual expiation, the high-priest entered into his immediate presence, and beheld his glory: thither the prayers of all his people were addressed: there were all their sacrifices accepted: and from thence were all his answers given.

Behold, then, under this image, the exalted privilege of the believing soul! God is with him in a way that he is not with any other creature in the universe. To him is the glory of God revealed: his every sacrifice of prayer or praise comes up with acceptance before God; and rich communications of grace and peace descend from God to him.

Take these two ideas:  
the believer dwelling in God, as in his house;  
and God dwelling in him, as in his temple  
—and you have a complete view of his felicity, as it is enjoyed from day to day.

***~~2. In his anticipations of the future—~~***

Love, exercised in the way before described, is "perfect;" that is, it is of the most perfect kind, and has attained a growth which marks a high measure of excellence: or, as the text expresses it, "Herein is our love made perfect, or manifested to be perfect, 2 Corinthians 12:9." And where such love is, there is, and will be, a sweet assurance of our acceptance in the day of judgment.

The latter verse of my text, as it stands in our translation, is so obscure, as scarcely to admit of explanation: but with a very slight alteration it is extremely clear. It may be read thus: "Herein is our love made perfect: so that we have boldness in the day of judgment: because as He is, so are we in this world. See [1 John 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 1.9); and especially [Revelation 13:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 13.13), where a precisely similar expression occurs, and is translated in this very way."

This is a blessed truth. The man who has attained this measure of love, has within himself a most decisive evidence of his own conversion, [1 John 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 3.14). None but God could accomplish within him such a blessed work; as the Apostle says, "Love is of God, verse 7." Hence, though he well knows his own remaining imperfections, he cannot but regard God as his Father: and he is perfectly assured, that a God of love will never cast away one who pants and labors constantly for a conformity to the Divine image. Hence "he has boldness in reference to the day of judgment;" being fully assured, that the Savior, in whom he has believed, and *by the operation of whose grace he has become what he is*, will "confess him before his Father," and "present him faultless before the presence of his Father's glory with exceeding joy!"

This is the disposition which infallibly "accompanies salvation;" as Paul has said: "Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case—things that accompany salvation. God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure! [Hebrews 6:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 6.9-11)."

My dear brethren, be diligent in this work, and this blessedness shall be yours! Only take care, that, in the habit of your minds, and in your daily walk, you "live in the world as God himself is;" and then you may look forward with comfort to the future judgment, assured that "you shall not be ashamed before him, at his coming."

***~~In reflecting on this subject, we cannot but see,~~***

***~~1. What enemies to themselves they are, who indulge unhallowed tempers!~~***

I will not say that they are enemies to God, whose law they violate; or to their fellow-creatures, whose peace they disturb. But I will say that they are enemies to themselves; for they actually drive God from them; and cause him, who would dwell in their hearts as their Comforter and their God—to become their enemy: as it is said, "If any man defiles the temple of God, him will God destroy, [1 Corinthians 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 3.17)."

What must be their prospects in relation to the eternal world? Can they enjoy any of the true Christian's confidence? Or, if they possess any confidence at all, is it not a horrible delusion? Religious professors speak much about their doubts and fears: and truly many of them have abundant reason to doubt and fear; for their tempers bear no resemblance whatever to "the meekness and gentleness of Christ." Yes, many of these professors have less self-government than the ungodly world; and they make all unhappy that are around them. As to their fears, they are right enough; but as to their doubts, it may well be questioned whether they are right: for if they were Christ's, they would "put on Christ," and "crucify those affections and lusts" which are so abhorrent to his religion! [Galatians 3:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 3.27); [Galatians 5:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 5.24).

They may *talk*of their faith: but if their faith does not work by love, it is no better than the faith of devils! The *fruit*of the Spirit is, love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control." If these fruits do not characterize our life and conduct, I hesitate not to say, that "our religion is vain!" James says, "If any man (high or low, rich or poor, old or young)—if any man among you seems to be religious (and make ever so fair a profession), and bridles not his tongue, but deceives his own heart—this man's religion is vain! [James 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James 1.26)."

I must therefore warn all, but religious professors in particular, that "what they sow, they shall surely reap! He who sows to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption. He alone who sows to the Spirit, shall from the Spirit reap life everlasting! [Galatians 6:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 6.7-8)."

***~~2. What a noble ambition has the true Christian!~~***

It is no inferior pattern that he is content to follow. He looks to see what God himself is to his creatures; and that would he be to the utmost extent of his power. "He would be an imitator of God himself, [Ephesians 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 5.1)." "As God is, so would he be in this world." Is God love? He would be love also; he would act nothing but love, and breathe nothing but love. O noble ambition! blessed object! sweet end of life!

What a Heaven would earth be, if all were of this mind and spirit! Come, beloved, and rise to the occasion. See what God is to the world at large: and be according to your power, alike benevolent, alike beneficent.

See also what God is to his redeemed people in particular: and be towards every Christian, so far as the individual himself is worthy of it, alike affectionate.

In a word, let your endeavor be, not only to be godly, but God-like! Be as "holy as he is holy;" and as "perfect, as your Father who is in Heaven is perfect!"

***~~#2460~~***

***~~INFLUENCE AND IMPORTANCE OF LOVE~~***

***~~[1 John 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 4.18)~~***

"There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love."

The essence of all true religion is love—love to God, working by love to man. Both tables of the law are fulfilled in this: and to bring us to such a state of mind is no less the intent of the Gospel, than of the law itself. John, than whom no inspired writer more fully unfolds the glories of the Gospel, abounds, more than any other Apostle, in exhortations to love. The preceding context more particularly insists on love to man: but the words before us, with the following context, speak rather of love to God. "We love him, because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother, verses 19-21."

Were we to interpret the text as speaking of love to man, it would not admit of any satisfactory explanation: but, as referring to God, it sets love before us in a very instructive point of view, in that it marks,

***~~I. Its influence, as a principle—~~***

***~~"Fear" is that passion which is chiefly dominant in the bosom of fallen man—~~***

Adam, before his fall, knew nothing of it: but, after his transgression, he fled from the face of God, and hidden himself among the trees of the garden. From that time, all the appearances of God or of angels to men have generated fear in the first instance; so that the persons most favored with such visions, have needed to be encouraged by that reviving expression, "Fear not! [Luke 1:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 1.12-13); [Luke 1:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 1.29-30)." Indeed, the whole religion of the heathen world has its foundation in fear: love to their deities is never an operative principle in their hearts. Even among ourselves, *until we are truly converted to God, the Supreme Being is rather an object of fear than of love*; insomuch that we like not to hear of him, or to reflect on our future appearance before him.

It is on this account that all which relates to God, his perfections, his purposes, yes, and even the mysteries of his grace and the wonders of his love—are, by universal consent, banished from our mutual fellowship and daily conversation. However cheerful a group may have been in their communications with each other, the*introduction of such topics as death, judgment, Heaven, and Hell, would cast a damp upon it, and induce a gloom, or a contemptuous smile, on every countenance!*

The Scripture tells us that this is the case with all; that "men, through the fear of death, are all their life-time subject to fear, [Hebrews 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 2.15);" and that they are "like the troubled sea, whose waters cast up mire and dirt"—utterly destitute of any solid peace or rest, [Isaiah 57:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 57.20-21).

There may, indeed, be in men a thoughtless indifference: but this is only while they can shake off reflection. No man can think of God and of eternity without many fears and misgivings: and the very efforts which men use to dissipate all serious thought, clearly show that they do not dare to think, and that God is to them an object of dread, and not of love.

***~~But "perfect love will cast out fear"—~~***

The two passions are opposed to each other, and counteract each other, as light and darkness: "there is no fear in love," nor any love in fear. If love arises in the soul, fear will be dispelled, like the clouds of the morning: but if fear prevail again, it will draw over the soul the curtains of night. Fear is excited by a view of God, as formidable in himself, and as hostile to us. But love views him as altogether lovely in himself, and as loving to us; and, consequently, banishes from the soul the sensations which a different view of the Deity had produced.*Love regards him as a Father, a Friend, a Savior, "a Portion," an "eternal great reward." What room is there for fear, when such views are realized in the soul?*

I speak not, indeed, of a *filial*fear; because that is a very essential part of love: but a *slavish*fear, a "fear that has torment," can find no place in a bosom that is filled with love. To a person who truly loves God, the thought of him will be sweet to the soul: and the more intimate he feels his access to God, the more sublime will be his joy.

As for *death*, to such a one it has lost its sting: it is even numbered among his richest treasures: "All things, says he, are mine, whether life or death, [1 Corinthians 3:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 3.22)." And so far is he from dreading the approach of the eternal state, that "he looks for, and earnestly desires, the coming of the day of Christ, [2 Peter 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 3.12);" and "longs to be dissolved, that he may be with Christ, [Philippians 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 1.21)." I do not say that this feeling is constant, or without any alloy; but that to produce this is the proper influence of love; and that it will be produced in proportion as love abounds in the soul.

This view of love naturally leads us to consider,

***~~II. Its importance as a test—~~***

***~~It is our privilege to be "made perfect in love"—~~***

Love, like every other grace, is weak in its beginnings. But it would not be always so: like patience, it would "have its perfect work, that we may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing." The command of God is that we should "love him with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength." And if we owe to him this measure of love as our *Creator*, much more do we as our *Redeemer*. After this, therefore, we would aspire; and, whatever our attainments in it are, we would be laboring daily to increase more and more; having more of a Spirit of love; and more of that "Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, *Abba, Father!"*

***~~Of its precise measure we may judge, by the remains of fear abiding in us—~~***

Examine with what feelings you contemplate God.

Examine what it is that chiefly operates to keep you from offending him, and what it is that chiefly stimulates you to duty.

Examine what your views are of death and judgment; whether they are *dreaded*as objects of fear—or *desired*as completing and consummating your bliss.

As for that horror to which some persons are subject at the sight of a reptile or an insect, it has nothing to do with the present subject: that is a mere constitutional weakness, to which a child of God may be exposed as well as others. Love will not produce much effect on that, except as it will habituate the mind to confide in God, and to commit everything to him. But in all things that are the proper objects of faith, love has full scope for exercise; and will present them to the mind in so favorable a view, as to cast out all fear in relation to them.

Behold then, I say, the two emotions are like the scales of a balance:

Where *fear*preponderates, *love*will be found but light.

Where *love*abounds, *fear*will in vain strive for an ascendant.

To judge of love by its own direct workings, may not be easy; because *the warmth of our feelings towards God may depend, in a measure, on the constitutional temperament of our minds*. But by its influence in dissipating and dispelling our fears, we may attain a correct judgment respecting it. If it is "perfect, it will cast out our fears;" but "if we fear, we are not yet made perfect in love."

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who have neither love nor fear—~~***

We have before said, that there may be persons of this character, who have*so hardened their hearts and seared their consciences, as to have contracted an insensibility to God and eternal things*. I am constrained to acknowledge, that many are found in this state even in a dying hour. But if they are deaf to the voice of conscience here on earth, it will be heard at the instant of their departure hence.

Could we but behold the obdurate sinner, or the scoffing infidel, on his first entrance into the presence of his God—does his boldness continue there? No! he cries to "the rocks to fall upon him, and the hills to cover him from the face of the Lamb!" whose warnings he disregarded, and whose threatenings he despised. Yes, though now more fearless than the devils (for they believe and tremble), the unbeliever will then know what "a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God!"

But is it fear that I wish to excite in your minds? Certainly not, except as a preparatory work to salvation. I wish your religion to begin with fear: but God forbid that it would end there. No! it must be carried on by love, if ever it shall terminate in joy. Yet, *until we are made sensible of our lost condition as sinners, we shall in vain hope to attain the peace and happiness of saints.*

***~~2. To those who are under the influence of both fear and love—~~***

These opposite feelings are compatible with each other, in the earlier period of our conversion. The day does not spring forth all at once in the natural world. Just so, nor does piety arrive at its meridian height at once in the spiritual world. But, to imagine that the entertaining of doubts and fears is a mark of humility, is quite erroneous: such a doubtful state of mind is rather an indication of ignorance and pride, than of true humility. For, granting that the progress which we have made in the divine life may be very small, still our duty is to lay hold on the divine promises, and to cast ourselves altogether on the Lord Jesus Christ as the appointed Savior of the world!

*The smallness of our attainments, or the strength of our corruptions, may well beget humility—but they should never lead us to doubt the sufficiency of Christ to save us.* Were we in the worst state to which a sinner can be reduced, our duty would be to believe in Christ, and to flee to him as to the refuge set before us. Faith is the parent of love; and not unbelief.

It is worthy of observation that the language of doubts and fears is confined to the Old-Testament dispensation. Such bondage does not befit the Christian's happier lot: it is dishonorable to God, and injurious to ourselves. Cast it off then; and seek to enjoy the full liberty of the Gospel. "The Son who has made you free, would have you free indeed."

I should, indeed, guard you against that kind of confidence which is founded on vain delusions. There are some who, from impulses, or visions, or other delusive imaginations, attain a confidence which they will not for a moment allow to be questioned. But this is not the confidence of love. Love is jealous of itself; and is glad to have its actings scrutinized with the utmost exactness. Love desires the honor of God; and is infinitely more anxious that he would be glorified, than that its own defects would be concealed. The *getting rid of fear is not at all the object of love, but the effect of it.*Let the one endeavor of your souls be to glorify your God; and with the growth of your love shall your peace and joy be multiplied, both in time and in eternity.

***~~#2461~~***

***~~GOD'S LOVE, THE SOURCE OF OUR LOVE~~***

***~~[1 John 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 4.19)~~***

"We love Him, because He first loved us!"

There is, as there ought to be, a great and visible difference between the Lord's people and others. But no one of them has any ground for glorying in himself: for, to every one of them may that question be applied, "Who made you to differ? and what do you have which you have not first received?" Truly, whatever attainments any man may have made, he must say, with the Apostle Paul, "By the grace of God I am what I am!" To this effect John speaks in the words before us; in which we are taught to trace the love which the saints bear to their God, not to any superior qualities in their own nature, but to God's free and sovereign grace: "We love Him, because He first loved us."

Now, this being a truth indispensably necessary to be known and felt, I will endeavor to point out—

***~~I. Its doctrinal use—~~***

Our love to God springing from, and being founded on, God's love to us, it is,

***~~1. Our love to God is an indispensable evidence of God's love to us—~~***

Supposing a person to affirm that God loves him as one of his peculiar people, I ask, What evidence have you of that fact? Your mere assertion is not sufficient to satisfy my mind: nor should a mere persuasion of it be sufficient to satisfy your mind. If God has really loved you, wherein has he manifested that love?

What has he done for you?

Has he revealed himself to you as reconciled in the Son of his love?

Has he poured out his Spirit upon you, as "a Spirit of adoption, enabling you to call him Abba, Father?"

Has he enabled you to surrender up yourself to him in all holy obedience to his will?

In a word, Has he brought you to "love him," and to serve him in truth?

If, in "his loving-kindness, he has drawn you" to himself, then you may be satisfied that "he has loved you with an everlasting love! [Jeremiah 31:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 31.3);" but without this evidence, your persuasion, however confident it may be, is a fatal delusion. The Jews of old affirmed that God was their Father: but our blessed Lord said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me." So I say to you, "It God have loved you, you must of necessity have been brought to love him."

***~~2. Our love to God is a decisive proof of his love to us—~~***

Suppose now a different character to be manifesting from day to day his love to God, and yet to be doubting and questioning God's love to him. I would ask, How did you obtain your love to God? Is it natural to you? Or did you form love to God in your own sinful heart?

By nature, you are as much a child of wrath as any other person in the universe! So corrupt are you by nature, that "every imagination of the thoughts of your heart is evil, only evil, continually." If there is any love to God in your heart—then it must have been imparted to you by God himself; who, of his own good pleasure, has wrought in you both to will and to do. If you behold the heavens and the earth, you conclude that they have been formed by an Almighty power. Just so, the same conclusion must you have, if there is any true love to God in your heart.

If you can say from your heart, "Whom have I in Heaven but you? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison with you"—then you may without hesitation add, "He who has wrought this in me is God!"

To appreciate this truth aright, we must consider,

***~~II. Its practical importance—~~***

Truly, it is of the utmost importance,

***~~1. For the forming of our judgment—~~***

It is well known, that confidence in God is our bounden duty: nor is it less clear that we are called to nourish in our bosoms a self-distrust respecting ourselves. But professors of religion are very apt to separate these habits, instead of combining them; and to carry both the one and the other to an undue extreme. One indulges carnal confidence, and carries it to presumption. Another indulges self-distrust, and extends it to despondency. But from both these extremes we should flee; maintaining no confidence which is not warranted by God's Word; and never carrying our self-distrust so far as to invalidate his truth. We must have a scriptural foundation for our hopes; and with God's promises before us, we must moderate our fears. Hope and fear have each its appropriate place in the believer's bosom, and should both be called into action in his experience. *They would be like the scales of a balance, rising or falling according to our secret walk before God.*If we are really living near to God, in the enjoyment of his presence and in the performance of his will—then our hope may grow to assurance, yes, and to "a full assurance." On the other hand, if we are far from God in secret, and harboring any secret sins in our bosom—then our fear ought to preponderate, and to be within us a friendly and faithful monitor.

Yet, again I say, that whether we "rejoice or tremble," extremes must be avoided: for we never can have such ground for joy, but that we have reason for trembling; or such ground for trembling, but that we have reason to rejoice. The person most confident of God's love should search and try his ways, to see whether he be requiting God aright, and walking worthy of his profession. The the person who is most doubtful of God's love would be careful not to write bitter things against himself, as though he were an outcast from God: for, if his attainments may justify a fear, his desires most assuredly justify a hope.

And, after all, the doubting Christian has the advantage of his presumptuous brother: for, though he has less of present comfort, he has, through God's abounding mercy, a greater measure of security!

***~~2. For the directing of our ways—~~***

Here it is taken for granted that every Christian loves his redeeming God. In that, we cannot err. Whether we have a greater or less persuasion of God's love to us, our duty is plain in reference to him. "He has so loved us, as to give his own Son to be an atoning sacrifice for our sins." Here then is ground enough for our love to him, and our affiance in him. Let all, then, stand upon this broad basis.

I deny not but that personal favors call for love and gratitude: but I say, that the mercies we all enjoy in common with each other, are grounds of love; and I call every one of you to devote yourselves to God with all possible fidelity and affection. Esteem him above all! Desire him above all! Delight in him above all! If our Lord put the question to you which he put to Peter, "Do you love you?" let your whole life and conduct testify in your behalf, so that you may appeal to him and say, "Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you!"

***~~#2462~~***

***~~GOD'S COMMANDMENTS NOT burdensome~~***

***~~[1 John 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 5.3)~~***

"His commandments are not burdensome."

It is a painful office which I have to discharge at this time. I must vindicate religion from an aspersion too generally cast upon it; and stand up in justification of Almighty God himself against the accusation of being a hard Master. The Apostle evidently supposed that there were in his day, and would from time to time arise, persons ready to calumniate their Maker, as having imposed upon them burdens which they were not able to bear, and as having exacted an obedience which it was unreasonable for him to require. Our own observation abundantly confirms and justifies the supposition; so that I need make no apology for proceeding to show:

***~~I. Why it is that we are apt to account God's commandments to be burdensome—~~***

That the great mass of mankind does account them burdensome, is a fact too notorious to admit of doubt. And why is this? Is it that they are indeed unreasonably severe? No! it springs,

***~~1. From our inveterate love of sin—~~***

Man, in his fallen state, is altogether corrupt! His carnal mind is enmity against God, so that it neither is, nor can be, subject to the law of God, so as to render to it any willing obedience.

We are alienated from God himself. As Adam, after he had sinned, fled from God—so, at this time, the language of fallen man to God is, "Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of your ways!" And when the faithful servants of God endeavor to bring them to a better mind, they reply, "Prophesy not unto us right things; prophesy unto us *smooth things*; prophesy deceits: make the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us."

To every particular command, not of the law only, but of the Gospel itself—the heart of man is averse.

Repentance is too painful a work.

Faith in Christ is too humiliating.

An unreserved surrender of the soul to Christ is too strict and rigorous.

Man wishes to be a God unto himself. "Who is Lord over us?" is the reply of all, when urged to renounce their evil ways, and to turn unto their God. They will not endure restraint, but "will walk after the imagination of their own evil hearts." Fire and water are not more opposed to each other, than they are to the commands of God; and hence they regard every injunction, whether of the Law or Gospel, as a yoke too burdensome to be borne!

***~~2. From the real difficulty which there is in obeying them—~~***

[Galatians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 5.17) For The desires of the flesh are opposed to the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are opposed to the flesh (godless human nature); for these are antagonistic to each other [continually withstanding and in conflict with each other], so that you are not free but are prevented from doing what you desire to do.

To man in Paradise the commands of God were easy, because his whole soul was in unison with them: but to fallen man they are not easy, even after he is renewed by grace. Paul justly says, "The desires of the flesh are opposed to the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are opposed to the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other, so that you cannot do the things that you would." Indeed, the metaphors by which the Christian life is set forth in the Holy Scriptures clearly show, that it is not maintained without great difficulty. A *race*is not won without great exertion, nor a *warfare*gained without severe conflicts.

Indeed, the terms in which our duty is set forth clearly show, that obedience, in our present fallen state, is no easy task. We are called to "mortify our members upon earth," and to "crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts." We are enjoined to "pluck out the right eye, and to cut off the right hand or foot, that may cause us to sin."

It is no wonder therefore that the unregenerate man accounts such commandments burdensome: for it must be confessed that they are altogether against the current of corrupt nature; and that, in order to obey them, we are constrained to urge our way continually against the stream.

But, while I acknowledge the difficulty which even the best of men experience in obeying the commandments, I can by no means admit that they are, or ought to be, considered, "burdensome." Indeed, a little reflection will show us:

***~~II. How far they are from deserving such a character—~~***

***~~1. All of God's commands are most reasonable in themselves—~~***

Can anything be more reasonable than that we would improve for God, the faculties we have received from him; and that we would serve Him, in whom we live, and move, and have our being? Is it unreasonable to require of us that we love the Savior, who has so loved us as to give himself for us? Or that, when "he has bought us with his own precious blood, we should glorify him with our bodies and our spirits, which are his?"

If it is said, that we are required even to lay down our lives for Christ's sake; I answer, True, we are: but has not he laid down his life for our sake? Has he not done this for us, too, when we were his enemies? Is it not reasonable, then, that we should be ready to die for him who is our greatest Friend? If he endured all the curses of God's broken law for us, yes, and for our sakes sustained all the wrath of Almighty God—should we think it a hard matter to encounter the wrath of feeble man, who, at most, "can only kill the body, and after that has no more that he can do?"

Were there no recompense beyond the grave, we could not justly complain of this command: but what shall we say, when we reflect on the crowns and kingdoms which every victorious servant of the Lord shall have awarded to him? Does any man account it a hard matter to sustain a momentary pain or trouble, in order to procure a prolongation of his bodily life? How, then, can anything be considered hard, that ensures to us the possession of eternal happiness and glory?

***~~2. All of God's commands are, without exception, conducive to our happiness—~~***

Truly, if we would designate obedience to God's commandments by its right name, we must call it rather *privilege*than duty. Was it not Adam's privilege in Paradise to know, and love, and serve his Creator? Is it not a privilege to all the saints and angels in Heaven to be incessantly occupied in singing praises to God and to the Lamb? Or if we look at the duties of repentance, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ—shall we not esteem them to be high privileges?

Offer them to the unhappy souls that are shut up in the prison of Hell under the wrath of Almighty God, and then tell me whether they will not be regarded as privileges.

But I will venture to ask of persons in this present life: Who among you ever spent a day or an hour in humiliation before God, and does not at this moment look back to it as the best season of his life? Who does not regret that such a season has passed away without a due improvement of it? Who would not be glad to have it renewed, protracted, perfected?

In truth, holiness in all its branches is the very perfection of our nature, and the restoration of our pristine happiness: and if we were as holy as the glorified saints and angels are, we would be not one atom inferior to them in peacefulness and bliss.

Say, then, whether the commandments of our God deserve to be accounted burdensome? No! In truth "they are all holy, and just, and good;" and "in keeping of them there is great reward."

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who entertain prejudices against the gospel as a hard service—~~***

Why will you not believe our blessed Lord and Savior, when he says to you, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light!" You will say, perhaps, This is contrary to experience; for everyone finds how difficult it is to be truly religious. *But what is it that makes it so? It is nothing but your own corruption that renders a conformity to God's commandments difficult!* If once you obtain a new heart, and have the law of God written on it by his Holy Spirit, I will pledge myself that you will find obedience to be as food to the hungry, health to the sick, and life to the dead!

Nor was there ever a human being turned effectually from sin to holiness, but he found religion's ways to be "ways of pleasantness and peace."

***~~2. Those who profess to serve God according to his Gospel—~~***

Men will judge of religion, in a great measure, by what they see in you. If they behold you rendering service to God on as contracted a scale as you think will consist with your ultimate safety, they will be confirmed in their notions of religion as a painful yoke, to which no one submits but from necessity. And*if they behold you going to the world for happiness*, they will feel assured, that, whatever you may affirm to the contrary, piety of itself is not sufficient to make you happy. On the other hand, if they behold you devoting yourselves wholly and unreservedly to the Lord, and walking cheerfully in his holy ways—then they will be constrained to acknowledge, that there is something in true piety which they have never tasted, and of which they at present can form no just conception.

Remember then, I beg you, how many eyes are upon you, and how great may be the *influence*of your conduct in the world. You may unhappily cast a stumbling-block before men, and involve them in ruin! Or you may recommend the ways of God, and be the means of saving many souls alive.

Get the love of God in your hearts, and then all will be comparatively easy. You will still, indeed, "find a law in your members warring against the law in your minds," but, on the whole, you will "delight in the law of God after your inward man;" and be able so to walk, that all who shall behold your light shall be constrained to "acknowledge that God is truly with you."

***~~#2463~~***

***~~OVERCOMING THE WORLD~~***

***~~[1 John 5:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 5.4-5)~~***

"Everyone who is born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God."

Christianity is a warfare: every follower of Christ is by profession a soldier. The enemies whom he is engaged to combat are, the world, the flesh, and the devil. It is of one of these more especially that my text speaks; and that is, the world. Mankind at large are led captive by it. The Christian combats and overcomes it. In this respect he differs from, and surpasses, all the human race. These things are plainly affirmed in the passage before us: which will lead me to show,

***~~I. The victory which every true Christian gains—~~***

***~~The Christian is here described as "born of God"—~~***

He is not only born of the flesh, like other men, but has a new nature imparted to him from above, and which he alone possesses. The Spirit of the living God, who moved upon the face of the waters, and reduced the whole chaotic mass of this world to order and beauty, has moved upon his soul, to restore it to the image of his Creator, in which it was originally formed, in righteousness and true holiness.

The person here spoken of as born of God, is also characterized as believing that Jesus is the Son of God. This shows what the process of the Holy Spirit is, in transforming the soul.

He makes us to feel our guilt before God,  
he reveals the Lord Jesus Christ to us, as the appointed Savior of the world,  
he enables us to believe in him, and to confess him openly before men, as all our salvation and all our desire.

Thus the regenerate person shows himself to be a believer in Christ; and the believer in Christ is regenerate. And hence the terms, as characterizing the child of God, are of the same import.

***~~He overcomes the world—~~***

From the moment that he experiences the regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit, he enters into conflict with the world, and overcomes it. He overcomes both its allurements and its terrors.

Everything in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is fascinating to the corrupt heart of man, and gains an ascendant, over all, while in their natural and carnal state. But the regenerate person has higher gratifications, which he desires as his supreme good, and for which he sacrifices all that this world can give him. He feels that earthly vanities debase the soul: and he will no longer be led captive by them. He says to them all, "Depart from me, I will keep the commandments of my God!"

In like manner, he triumphs over its terrors also. The world will take up arms against those who dare to oppose its maxims and its habits. Sometimes, by contempt and ridicule it will endeavor to check the Christian's progress; and sometimes by the most envenomed hostility and bitter persecution. But the regenerate person braves all the world's hostility, and will be deterred by nothing from following the path of duty. If the whole creation were to rise up against him, he would say, Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, you judge: for I cannot but do what my God has enjoined.

There are those who will have regeneration to consist in baptism. But I would ask, Can it be said of every baptized person, that he overcomes the world? Does not the whole state of the Christian world contradict this? *Are there any, among heathen themselves, more captivated by its allurements or enslaved by its terrors, than millions of baptized persons are?*This shows incontrovertibly, that whatever blessing God may see fit to confer on any particular persons in baptism, baptism itself is not, and cannot be, regeneration: for, if it were, every baptized person must, of necessity, overcome the world; which we see and know is far from being true in fact.

There is a peculiarity in the expression in my text, which will serve to throw considerable light on this subject. It is said, "Whoever is born of God overcomes the world. In conversion a new nature is formed within us, [2 Peter 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 1.4); a new principle, new judgment, new taste—is imparted to us: and the whole of that is, in its very nature, opposed to the world, even as light is to darkness: and, as light struggles with darkness until it has overcome it, so does that new and heaven-born principle, which is imparted to us in conversion, conflict with, and overcome, the world; so that the bonds in which, during our unregenerate state, we were held, are broken, and we are enabled to walk at liberty, in the way of God's commandments. This may be well explained by an expression of our blessed Lord, who says, "Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life! [John 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 4.14)." The meaning of which passage, is that the Holy Spirit's constant tendency and operation will be to bring us to everlasting life. A fountain is always sending forth its waters upwards: and so shall the Holy Spirit within us always operate to raise the soul from earth to Heaven. Let the two passages be compared; and they will show, not what *baptism*does—but what the *new nature*, which the Spirit of God imparts in conversion, will effect, in all that are truly regenerate.

Let us now point out,

***~~II. The means by which he achieves this victory—~~***

The Christian, to his last hour, is no stronger in himself than others. He is, from first to last, like a new-born infant in its mother's arms. But, as we have already seen, he believes in Christ; and, through the faith which is thus formed in his soul, he is enabled to maintain his conflicts even to the end: "This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith."

***~~1. From faith he derives his motives—~~***

He believes all that the Scriptures have spoken respecting the world, and all who belong to it: "It lies in wickedness, verse 19," and will finally "be condemned, [1 Corinthians 11:32](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 11.32)." He believes, too, that a very principal end for which our blessed Savior gave himself for us was, "that he might deliver us from this present evil world, [Galatians 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 1.4)." Under this conviction, he engages on the side of his Lord and Savior; and determines, through grace, that what Jesus so desired, shall surely be effected. Hence he draws the sword, and throws away the scabbard. He will "not be conformed to this world: but will seek to be transformed by the renewing of his mind, that he may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God, [Romans 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 12.2)."

If at any time he is tempted to taste of its cup, he puts it from his lips, as David did the waters from the well of Bethlehem; saying, 'Be it far from me, O Lord, that I would do this: Is not this the blood of my Lord and Savior, who not only jeopardized his life, but laid it down for me? I will not drink it! [2 Samuel 23:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Sam 23.16-17).' In like manner, if bonds and imprisonments await him for his fidelity, he will say, "I am ready, not only to be bound, but also to die, at any time, and in any manner, for my Lord's sake! [Acts 21:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 21.13)." "Constrained by the love of Christ," he "wars a good warfare," and thus "endures unto the end! [Matthew 10:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 10.22)."

***~~2. From faith he receives his strength—~~***

By faith he is united to the Lord Jesus Christ, as a branch to the vine; and by faith also he receives, out of his fullness, grace, according to his necessities, [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.16); [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 15.5). "In Christ he is strong" and invincible, [2 Timothy 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Tim 2.1); and "through Christ he can do all things, [Philippians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 4.13)."

To the natural man the Christian's conduct is perfectly inexplicable. He cannot conceive how a poor weak creature like himself would be able so to overcome all the *allurements*of sense, and all the *terrors*of an infuriated world. But the Christian soldier has armor provided for him, even armor of a heavenly temper; and through that he is enabled to sustain the unequal combat, [Ephesians 6:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 6.11), and to triumph over all his enemies [2 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 2.14). Thus does he "fight the good fight of faith [1 Timothy 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Tim 6.12);" and thus is he made "more than conqueror, through him who loved him! [Romans 8:37](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.37)."

But in this victory he stands alone; as you will see, while I show,

***~~III. His exclusive claim to this prowess—~~***

God himself appeals to us: "Who but the regenerate ever effects this?"

Look through the world, and see, "Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God!" It must be remembered, that *a mere speculative faith in Christ is not that which is here spoken of*, but such a faith as leads us altogether to rely on Christ for everything, and to devote ourselves entirely to his service.

And now, I ask, where will you find one single person, except the regenerate believer, who so overcomes the world? You may find some who seclude themselves from it: but they flee from the combat altogether. You may find some who retire from it in disgust: but they are overcome by it. The person for whom I inquire is, a man who lives in the world, and fulfills all his civil, social, and personal duties in it; and yet is enabled:  
to discard all its maxims,  
to scorn all its customs,  
to despise all its vanities,  
to mortify all its corruptions;  
and, while in the world, not to be of it, any more than the Savior himself was [John 17:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 17.14); [John 17:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 17.16).

*Where will you find one who makes the Word of God his sole directory; and determines to adhere to that, in opposition to all the contempt that can be poured upon him, or the persecution which he may be called to endure?* Search among the despisers of spiritual regeneration, and see if you can find one of this character: search among the despisers of a life of faith, and see if you can find one. You may search all the records of the world, and I will defy you to find one. God himself sets you at defiance. Go, search him out: "Who is he who thus overcomes the world?" I tell you there is not one on earth, except "he who is born of God," and "he who believes in Jesus" as his only hope.

There may be found persons who flee from the world: but they do not act "as good soldiers of Jesus Christ." The people who fight and overcome, are those only who have been before described: and it is through faith in Christ alone that they maintain the conflict, "it is by the cross of Christ alone that the world is crucified unto them, and they unto the world! [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 6.14)."

On the other hand, What truly regenerate man does not sincerely strive to overcome the world?

Every one that is born of God strives for this. Whatever be his age or condition in life, it makes no difference; whether he be a king on his throne, or a beggar on the dunghill, this is his desire, and this his conduct. In the external habits of men there must, of necessity, he a great difference: because it is not possible for a monarch to live precisely in the style and manner of a private man: but, in the internal principles and feelings, there will be no difference whatever between the rich man that lives in splendor, and the poor Lazarus that lies at his gate. The hearts of all, whether young or old, rich or poor, learned or unlearned—will rise superior to the world; they will all account themselves "pilgrims and sojourners here;" and "have their conduct in Heaven, [Hebrews 11:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 11.13) and [Philippians 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 3.20)," where their treasure is, and where they hope to spend a blissful eternity in the presence of their God!

***~~Behold then here,~~***

***~~1. A test whereby to try your spiritual state—~~***

You cannot wish for a better touchstone than this. You see that every Christian in the universe will stand this trial; and that no other person whatever can. To a certain extent, the unregenerate and unbelieving may resemble the regenerate believer: but when you bring them to this test, the difference between them will instantly appear.

Here, in fact, is the true point of distinction between the nominal and the real Christian: the nominal Christian is of this world: and the real Christian is not of this world, nor has he any desire to be of it: for he knows, that even "to desire its friendship, is to be an avowed enemy of God! [James 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James 4.4)."

***~~2. A rule whereby to regulate our conduct—~~***

"We must he dead unto the world," even as our Lord himself was. And does this appear unreasonable, or impracticable? Let anyone imagine a number of angels, sent down from Heaven, to occupy different stations in the world for a season: how would they conduct themselves? They would take each his station, whether it were to rule a kingdom, or to sweep the streets. They would look down with contempt upon all the vanities of the world; and would stand at the remotest distance from its contagion. They would be intent only on serving God in their respective places, that they might be approved by him when they would be called to give up their account.

Now, what would hinder *us*from considering ourselves in this precise point of view? True, we have corruptions, which the angels have not: but these corruptions are to be mortified, and not indulged: and though our duty is rendered the more difficult by means of them, it is not a whit altered.

Nor need we despair of attaining at least some measure of victory over the world; because the Spirit within us has always this bearing; and because the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom we believe, has said, "My grace shall be sufficient for you."

This, then, I would recommend to every regenerate soul, "Love not the world, nor anything that is in the world! [1 John 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 2.15-16);" but let the same mind be in you as was in Christ Jesus, and endeavor in all things to "walk as he walked! [1 John 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 2.6)."

***~~#2464~~***

***~~JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION BY CHRIST~~***

***~~[1 John 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 5.6)~~***

"This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth."

There are in the Scriptures, and especially in the history of our blessed Lord, many circumstances recorded, which appear to have been accidental and of no consequence, while they were in reality ordained of God, and of the utmost importance for the advancement of his glory.

For instance, the soldiers offering him vinegar upon the cross, and dividing some of our Lord's clothing, and casting lots for the remainder; what trifles do these circumstances appear, when compared with all the other events of that day! Yet by means of them were the most improbable prophecies fulfilled, and the strongest possible testimony given to the Messiahship of Jesus.

Another circumstance I will mention as deserving of particular notice, namely, that of the soldier, without any order from his superiors, piercing our Lord with his spear after he was dead. This, as far as respected the soldier, was a mere wanton act either of cruelty or contempt; of cruelty, if he doubted whether he was not yet alive; and of contempt, if he believed him to be really dead. But that act of his, while it fulfilled a very remarkable prophecy, was productive of consequences which are replete with instruction to the whole world. On his inflicting the wound, there came forth from our Savior's side both water and blood, not blended together, but in streams visibly distinct from each other.

John, who was the only disciple present, took particular notice of this. He saw it with his own eyes: and, in his Gospel, he records it as a most remarkable event, to which he could bear the most assured testimony, and of which he was extremely anxious that every one would be informed: "One of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe, [John 19:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 19.34-35)." It is to this that the Apostle alludes in the words of our text, "This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood" and the same concern does he manifest to impress it deeply on our minds, when he adds, "The Spirit bears witness to it; and the Spirit is truth." Let me then, in conformity with his example, call your attention to,

***~~I. The truth here specified—~~***

In this event there was a deep stupendous mystery, inasmuch as it declared, in a very striking way, the great ends of our Savior's death. Take the Apostle's assertion,

***~~1. As simply declared—~~***

Our Lord "Jesus Christ came by water and blood." He came as "a teacher sent from God,"  
to instruct us in the knowledge of his will,  
to lead us also by his own example,  
and by the gift of his grace to strengthen us for the attainment of universal holiness.

This is called "coming by water:" for, as water is of use to cleanse and purify, so his doctrine was to cleanse and purify our souls from every species of defilement.

But it was not merely as a *teacher*that Jesus came, but to make an *atonement*also for sin. This he was to do by offering himself a sacrifice for us upon the cross: and this he did, shedding his own most precious blood, that through it we might be purged from guilt, and be reconciled to our offended God. In this he differed from all who had ever come before him. The different prophets that had been sent from God, came solely for the former purpose: and John the Baptist, who baptized such multitudes in the wilderness, professed that the whole scope of his ministry was to lead men to repentance. But Jesus had a higher end in view. Repentance, however deep, and reformation, however extensive, would have been of no avail—if an atonement had not been offered to God for the sins of men: and this office neither men nor angels could undertake: he alone was sufficient for it: *his Divine nature would give a virtue and efficacy to his blood*, and would render it a sufficient atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world. For that end therefore he assumed our nature, and died upon the cross; so that, as my text expresses it, "he came by blood."

***~~2. As solemnly confirmed—~~***

There is a peculiar emphasis to be observed in the Apostle's mode of repeating his assertion. The circumstance of the blood and water flowing in distinct streams from the wounded side of our Savior, was intended emblematically to declare the united ends of his death. The Apostle therefore would not allow it to be overlooked, lest by a partial view of Christ, as a Prophet only, we would lose the blessings which he came to purchase for us.

The mode appointed by the law for the purifying of the leper, will place this matter in a just point of view. Two birds were taken: one of them was killed over running water, and his blood was mingled with the water. The blood and water were then sprinkled seven times upon the leper, and the living bird, being dipped in the blood and water, was let loose into the open field, and the leper was pronounced clean, [Leviticus 14:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lev 14.4-7).

This was intended to show how man would be cleansed from sin. The Lord Jesus Christ would shed his blood as an atonement for sin: he would also send forth his Spirit upon man: by neither of these separately would he fulfill the office of a Savior; and by neither of these separately could man be restored to the favor of his God. The union of the two was necessary for all; and the two united would be effectual for all: so that, however deep any one's leprosy may have been, he shall, the very instant he has been so purified, be pronounced clean.

This then all must carefully notice, if they would possess the full benefits of Christ's salvation.

In addition to his own testimony, the Apostle further confirms his assertion, by adducing,

***~~II. The testimony which the Holy Spirit bears to it—~~***

The Holy Spirit, "the Spirit of truth," has borne witness to the doctrine inculcated in our text, by visible operations on the souls of men.

The Holy Spirit has attested this truth by his immediate agency on the soul. He came down in a visible shape, in cloven tongues, as of fire, upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost, in order to qualify them to proclaim these truths in all manner of languages; and, in confirmation of their word, he converted three thousand souls to God in one day, enlightening all their minds, renewing all their souls, and filling them all with the richest consolations.

When Peter opened the Gospel to the Gentiles also, in the house of Cornelius, the Holy Spirit again bore witness to the truth in the same manner. The manner in which this is noticed by the historian, is worthy of particular observation. Peter, in his discourse respecting Christ, said, "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whoever believes in him shall receive remission of sins." Then we are told, "While Peter yet spoke these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all those who heard the word." Here you perceive, it was at the very moment when Peter was proclaiming Jesus as a Savior, not as a teacher, but as a Savior, who was "come not by water only, but by water and blood," that the Holy Spirit descended visibly upon all to attest that blessed truth.

So, in like manner, at the present day, the Holy Spirit bears witness to this truth in every place: he works by it:  
to the conversion of men to God,  
to the enriching of them with peace and joy,  
to the transforming of them into the Divine image,  
and to the bringing of them safely to glory.

No other doctrine is ever honored by him for these ends; but this is invariably, wherever it is proclaimed with that fidelity which befits a servant of Christ.

The people who receive this doctrine into their hearts, are themselves made living witnesses of its truth, being enabled by it to live as no other persons can live, and to shine as lights in a dark benighted world. In every age this doctrine has been, and to the end of the world it shall be, "preached with the Holy Spirit sent down from Heaven, 1 Peter 1:12."

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Be careful to receive these truths into your hearts—~~***

It cannot be that, when so much care has been taken to reveal them to us, we would be at liberty to neglect them: yet are they most grievously neglected by the great majority of the Christian world. The blood of Christ is actually denied by many as an atonement for sin: and of those who do not systematically deny its virtue, many are yet unmindful of it as a source of salvation to their own souls. And as for the influences of the Holy Spirit, they are derided by the generality as the dreams of a heated imagination.

Ah! brethren, let it not be thus with you. Trample not in this ungodly manner upon "the blood of the covenant," whereby alone you can be purged from guilt: and "do not such despite to the Spirit of God," by whose all-powerful influence alone you can ever be truly sanctified and saved! But rather seek to be yourselves living witnesses of their truth and efficacy. Seek by the sprinkling of the blood of Christ upon your souls to obtain peace with God and in your own consciences: and seek by the effusion of the Spirit of God upon your souls to be renewed in your inward man, and rendered fit for Heaven. So shall you in this world be "epistles of Christ, known and read by all men;" and in the world to come be everlasting trophies of his redeeming love!

***~~2. Beware that you never attempt to separate what God has joined together—~~***

Some there are of a self-righteous turn, who look to sanctification only as the means of recommending them to God; while others of an Antinomian cast think of little but of justification through the Redeemer's blood. But both of these are involved in most grievous errors; and, if they obtain not juster views of Gospel truth, will perish forever!

For, on the one hand, there is no fountain opened for sin and for impurity, but that which was opened on Mount Calvary!

Nor, on the other hand, can anyone who is unsanctified behold the face of God in peace: for "without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

If any take refuge in the doctrines of predestination and election, let them know that God has ordained the means as well as the end; and that, if we are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father," it is "through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience, and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ! [1 Peter 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Pet 1.2)." Whichever of these truths any man confides in as of exclusive importance, we would say to him, as our Lord said to the self-deceiving Pharisees, "These ought you to have done, and not to leave the other undone."

***~~#2465~~***

***~~THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY VINDICATED~~***

***~~[1 John 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 5.7)~~***

"For there are three that bear record in Heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one."

Never was there any record so well attested, so worthy of acceptance, so necessary to be believed—as that which God has given of his Son. Upon the receiving or rejecting of it depends the eternal welfare of every person. The riches of wisdom, and love, and mercy that are contained in it, surpass all the comprehension of men or angels. With respect to the truth of it, every species of testimony that could be given to it by friends or enemies, by angels from Heaven, by men on earth, yes, even by devils themselves, has been given in the most abundant degree. But it has been confirmed by other testimony still, even by the Three Persons in the adorable Trinity.

From the words before us, we shall be led to show:

***~~I. Who they are that are here said to "bear record"—~~***

Much has been written, and well written, to disprove the authenticity of this text. Certainly, if the genuineness of this text be admitted, and the sense be given to it which those who adduce it as establishing the doctrine of the Trinity, maintain, it will put an end to all controversy on the subject of the Trinity. But we need not be anxious about the validity of this individual passage, as though the doctrine of the Trinity rested upon it; since, if the text were expunged from the Bible, there are a multitude of others which maintain most unequivocally the same important truth.

To establish the mysterious doctrine of a Trinity in Unity, we shall lay down, and substantiate, three positions:

***~~1. There is but one God—~~***

The unity of God may be deduced even from reason itself: but it is repeatedly affirmed in Scripture. Compare [Deuteronomy 6:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 6.4) with [Mark 12:29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark 12.29); nor must a doubt of it ever be allowed to enter into our minds. It is true, that in a subordinate sense there are gods many, and lords many; because angels, and magistrates, and the idols of heathen, are sometimes called by these names on account of the resemblance they bear to God in the authority vested in them, and the respect paid to them: but there is One Supreme Being, who alone is self-existent, and from whom all other beings, whether in Heaven or earth, derive their existence. He, and he only, is God! [1 Corinthians 8:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 8.5-6).

***~~2. Though there is only one God—yet there are three distinct Persons in the Godhead—~~***

In reference to this subject, we use the term persons, because there is no other so suitable: but we mean not that these persons are in all respects as distinct from each other as Peter, James, and John; but only that in some respects they are distinguished from each other, though they exist together in one undivided essence.

It is certain that there are three persons mentioned in the Scripture: for baptism is ordered to be administered, not in the name of God merely, but "in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, [Matthew 28:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 28.19)." These three are represented as distinct from each other; for the Son has told us, that "he will send the Holy Spirit from the Father, [John 15:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 15.26)." They are moreover spoken of as performing separate offices in the work of redemption:  
the Father *elects*, [Ephesians 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 1.4);  
the Son *redeems*, [Ephesians 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 1.7);  
the Spirit *sanctifies*, [Romans 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 15.16).

Peter, comprising in few words the whole mystery of redemption, ascribes to each of these persons his proper office, [1 Peter 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Pet 1.2). They are also declared to be sources of distinct blessings to the Church; the Apostle prays, that "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, may be with us all, [2 Corinthians 13:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 13.14).

***~~3. Each of these persons is God, without any difference or inequality—~~***

We shall not occupy any time with proving the Godhead of the Father; but, taking that for granted, we shall establish the Godhead of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

To each of these belong the same NAMES as unto the Father. Is the Father God?

So is the Word, [John 1:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.1), (as Christ is called in the text). He is "Emmanuel, God with us, [Matthew 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 1.23)," God manifest in the flesh, [1 Timothy 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Tim 3.16), the mighty God, [Isaiah 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 9.6), God over all, blessed for evermore [Romans 9:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 9.5). To Him is also given the incommunicable name, Jehovah; for we are to call him, "Jehovah our Righteousness, [Jeremiah 23:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 23.6)."

To the Holy Spirit also these names belong. Ananias, in lying unto the Holy Spirit, lied unto God, [Acts 5:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 5.3-4). And we, in being the temples of the Holy Spirit, are the temples of God, 1 Corinthians 3:16. The words also which were confessedly spoken by Jehovah to the Prophet Isaiah, [Isaiah 6:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 6.9-10), are quoted by Paul as spoken by the Holy Spirit, [Acts 28:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 28.25).

To each of these the same ATTRIBUTES also are ascribed as characterize the Father. Is the Father eternal, omnipresent, omniscient, almighty?

So is the Son, [Micah 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 5.2) and [Hebrews 13:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 13.8). [Matthew 18:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 18.20); [Matthew 28:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 28.20). [John 2:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 2.25); [John 21:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 21.17). [John 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.3) and [Matthew 28:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 28.18).

And so is the Holy Spirit, [Hebrews 9:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 9.14). [Psalm 139:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 139.7-8). [1 Corinthians 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 2.10). [Genesis 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 1.2) and [Job 26:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 26.13).

What now is the conclusion to be drawn from these premises, but that which is asserted in the text, that "there are Three that bear record in Heaven; and that those Three are One. Hence we see how properly we are taught to express our belief of this doctrine in the Athanasian Creed: "We worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the persons, nor dividing the substance; for there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit. The Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, is all one, the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal …So that in all things the Unity in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, is to be worshiped."

Having shown that by the Three Witnesses we are to understand the Triune God, we proceed to show,

***~~II. What that is concerning which they bear record—~~***

We may well expect that the importance of the matter to which these Divine Witnesses have borne record, is suited to the majesty of the Witnesses themselves. Accordingly we find, that:

***~~Their testimony relates to the salvation that is in Christ Jesus—~~***

God, who had passed by the angels that fell, has looked in mercy upon fallen man, and has given us eternal life, in and through his Son Jesus Christ, verse 11. He sent his dear Son to die in our stead, and, by his own obedience unto death, to work out a righteousness whereby we might be saved. The merit whereby we are to be justified, and the grace whereby we are to be renewed, he treasured up for us in Christ; and he calls all men to receive these blessings out of his fullness. This way of salvation is open for all, and sufficient for all: but, this rejected, no other way of salvation remains for us!

This is the sum and substance of the Gospel; and this it is to which the Sacred Three bear record.

***~~Nor is their testimony at all more than the subject requires—~~***

If God himself had not revealed such things—then who could ever have imagined them? *Who could have ever imagined God becoming incarnate, and by his own death, expiating the guilt of his own creatures!* Who could ever have devised a plan so calculated to exalt the perfections of God; so suited to answer the necessities of man; and so efficacious to renew us after the Divine image? Besides, supposing these things to have been reported, who would ever have believed them, if they had not been thus divinely attested?

Notwithstanding the testimonies given by the Sacred Three, there is yet reason to adopt that reiterated complaint, "Who has believed our report? [Isaiah 53:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 53.1). [John 12:38](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 12.38). [Romans 10:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 10.16)." Professions of faith indeed abound among us; but a true believer, whose feelings and conduct accord with his professions, is "a sign and a wonder" in Christendom itself! [Isaiah 8:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 8.18).

It remains yet to be declared,

***~~III. In what manner they bear record—~~***

***~~Each of these Divine Persons has borne record at divers times, and in different manners—~~***

The Father thrice bore witness to Christ by an audible voice from Heaven; declaring at the same time his acquiescence in him as the Savior of men; and requiring us at the peril of our souls to "hear" and receive him in that character, [Matthew 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 3.17); [Matthew 18:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 18.5) and [John 12:28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 12.28). Moreover, in raising Christ from the dead, he yet more emphatically testified, that he had discharged the debt for which he had been imprisoned in the grave, and was "able to save to the uttermost all that would come unto God through him! [Romans 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 1.4)."

The Lord Jesus Christ continually bore witness to himself. When asked, "If you are the Christ, tell us plainly;" he answered, "I have told you, and you believe me not, [John 10:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 10.24-25)." "Before Pontius Pilate he witnessed the same good confession, [1 Timothy 6:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Tim 6.13)," though he knew that it would issue in his death. After his resurrection, he called himself "the true and faithful witness," and testified, "I am he who was dead and am alive again, and have the keys of death and of Hell! [Revelation 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 1.18); [Revelation 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 3.14)."

The Holy Spirit also bore witness to him, when he descended in a bodily shape, like a dove upon him: and again, when he came down in the likeness of fiery tongues upon the Apostles, and converted three thousand to the Christian faith. Similar testimonies he continued to give, [Acts 10:44-45](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 10.44-45); and at this very day, when any are converted to the faith, it is owing to the testimony which the Holy Spirit bears to Christ, "the Spirit testifies of him," and thereby produces conviction or consolation in the soul, [John 15:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 15.26); [John 16:7-11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 16.7-11).

Thus the Sacred Three bear record in Heaven, and by their united testimony encourage our acceptance of the salvation offered us in the Gospel.

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How unreasonable and dangerous is unbelief!~~***

If only *men*, who are credible and competent witnesses, attest a thing—we think it right to believe them. What an insult then is it to the Sacred Three to doubt *their*testimony! Yet this, alas! is the treatment which their record meets with in the world. Some reject it as "a cunningly-devised fable;" while others, professing a regard to it in general, deny the most important part of it, the necessity of being saved by Christ alone. Even those who in their hearts approve the Gospel, are too apt to doubt the freeness and sufficiency of the salvation revealed in it. Let every one consider the extreme sinfulness of such conduct, and abhor the thought of "making God a liar! verse 9, 10."

***~~2. What obligation lies upon believers to bear an open testimony to the truth!~~***

It is evident how earnestly God desires that his dear Son would be known, and that the salvation wrought out by him would be embraced. Now believers are his witnesses in the midst of a blind deluded world. Ought they then to be ashamed or afraid to bear their testimony for God? What if the world agrees to call the Gospel a delusion, and to consider all as hypocrites or fanatics who embrace it? Would that deter us from making a public profession of his truth? Would we not rather be the bolder in confessing Christ, in proportion as others are bold in denying him?

But let us not confine our profession to creeds and forms: *the best and most acceptable way of declaring our faith in Christ, is by manifesting to the world its efficacy on our hearts and lives.*This will make them think that there is a reality in the Gospel; and may contribute to win many who never would obey the written word.

***~~3. How exalted must be the glory which believers will enjoy in Heaven!~~***

It cannot be conceived that the Three Persons of the Godhead would have devised and executed such a wonderful plan of salvation, if the end to be accomplished by it were not exceedingly glorious. Surely all that the love of the Father can devise, all that the blood of Christ can purchase, all that the Holy Spirit can impart—is prepared for us in the eternal world, and shall be bestowed on us according to our measure and capacity to receive it. Yes, in Heaven we shall see God as he is, and have the brightest discoveries of his glory. And, while we have the richest enjoyment of his presence and love, we ourselves shall be witnesses for him:  
how far his mercy could reach,  
what astonishing changes it could effect, and  
what blessedness it can bestow on the most unworthy of mankind!

***~~#2466~~***

***~~THE BELIEVER'S INWARD WITNESS~~***

***~~[1 John 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 5.10)~~***

"He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself."

The truth of our holy religion is confirmed by every kind of evidence that the heart of man can desire. Not only was it established by an appeal to *prophecy*, but by *miracles*without number. Nay more, as the religion of Moses had at the very time different rites appointed in commemoration of the principal events with which that dispensation was marked; as the feast of the *Passover*, to commemorate the destruction of the Egyptian first-born, and the preservation of Israel—and the feast of *Pentecost*, to commemorate the giving of the law—and the feast of *tabernacles*, to commemorate their living in tents in the wilderness; so has Christianity been attested by the Holy "Spirit" given to the Apostles, and "the water" of baptism, which was administered on that very day, and "the blood" of the cross commemorated by the cup which is drank by all in the supper of the Lord.

As convincing as these testimonies are, the true believer has one peculiar to himself, one abiding in his own bosom, arising from his own experience: "He who believes on the Son of God has the witness in himself;" the witness of Christ, and of his salvation; of its *necessity*, its *suitableness*, its *sufficiency*. The true believer has in himself the witness of the salvation

***~~I. The true believer has in himself the witness of the necessity of salvation—~~***

The generality of persons see no need of such a salvation as the Gospel has provided. Many have no conception that they merit condemnation at the hands of God; or that there can be any occasion for more than a mere exercise of mercy, without any atonement offered to divine justice for their sins, or any righteousness to be imputed to them for their justification before God.

But the believer has views of his own exceeding sinfulness, and of his utter incapacity to reconcile himself to God, and of his need of a Savior to effect salvation for him. He is conscious that no repentance of his can ever suffice to expiate his guilt, nor any good works of his prevail for the purchase of Heaven: and hence he is in his own apprehension as much lost without a Savior, as the fallen angels are, for whom no Savior has been provided.

***~~II. The true believer has in himself the witness of the suitableness of salvation—~~***

Looking into his own bosom to explore his needs, and then examining the Holy Scriptures to see what provision God has made for him, he sees that the one corresponds with the other as a lock with the key that opens it. He has no need in himself for which he does not see in Christ a suitable supply: nor does he behold in Christ anything which he does not need.

Is Christ both God and man? Such a one does the believer see that he stands in need of; even man to take on him what man was bound to do and suffer; and God to render that work effectual for our salvation.

Did the believer need an atonement for his guilt, a righteousness wherein to stand before God?

Did he need a divine power to renew his soul?

Did he need an Advocate with the Father to intercede for him?

Did he need a head of vital influence to impart unto him all seasonable supplies of grace?

This, and ten thousand times more than this, does he find in Christ, whose fullness corresponds with his necessities, as an impression with the seal; in neither of which is there a jot or tittle either superfluous or defective.

The every office of Christ, and every character is precisely that which the believer needs:  
to the hungry, Jesus is bread;  
to the thirsty, Jesus is a living fountain of water;  
to the sick, Jesus is a Physician;  
to the dead, Jesus is life!

***~~III. The true believer has in himself the witness of the sufficiency of salvation—~~***

The believer feels in himself that he is a partaker of those very benefits which Christ came to bestow. He is alive from the dead, and is enabled to live as no unregenerate man can live. Let any one behold a river which a few hours ago was running down with a rapid current to the sea, running back again with equal rapidity to the fountain head; and will he doubt how this is effected? He may not be able to say what influence that is by which it is produced, or how that operation is effected: but he sees that there is a power which has wrought this: he sees it in its effects, just as he sees the trees agitated by the wind, though he knows not whence that wind comes, or where it goes. He cannot declare how the Spirit which Jesus has imparted to him, operates upon his soul: but he can no more doubt who it is that has thus created him anew, than who it is that formed the universe. He is a perfect wonder to himself:  
a *spark*kept alive in the midst of the ocean;  
a *bush*ever burning—yet never consumed.

He is a living witness for the Lord Jesus, that he is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him.

***~~Behold then here,~~***

***~~1. The true nature of the Gospel—~~***

The Gospel is a remedy. The whole world are sick: and in Christ Jesus there is all that every sinner needs! [1 Corinthians 1:30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 1.30).

***~~2. The blessedness of those who truly receive it—~~***

All are in one great hospital: and those who do not submit to the physician die: but those who take his prescriptions live. True, they are not cured at once: it is possible too that they may suffer occasional *relapses*for a season: but through the care of their heavenly Physician, their recovery is progressive; and when the good work is perfected within them, they are removed to that happy world, of which "no inhabitant will ever have occasion to complain that he is sick."

What a witness will the believer have within himself at that day! At that day there will be among all the millions of the saints but one feeling of perfect health, and but one ascription of praise "to him who loved them, and washed them from their sins, and made them kings and priests unto their God and Father for ever and ever!"

***~~#2467~~***

***~~THE GOSPEL RECORD~~***

***~~[1 John 5:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 5.11-12)~~***

"This is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life."

In matters that are established by human testimony, we necessarily proportion our assent to the number and credibility of the witnesses. And if we will act in the same manner towards the Holy Scriptures, we shall not entertain a doubt, either of their Divine authority in general, or of the way of salvation contained in them.

Moses and all the prophets concur with the Apostles in directing our eyes to Christ as the only Savior of the world: but in the words before us we have the testimony of One whose information cannot be doubted, and whose veracity cannot be impeached; of One who is too *good*to deceive, and too *wise*to be deceived. This witness is no other than Jehovah himself.

Let us then consider,

***~~I. His testimony concerning his Son, and concerning the way of salvation through him—~~***

This record embraces two points; and asserts,

***~~1. That "God has given to us eternal life"—~~***

Since the fall of Adam, man has lost all right to life. In him we died, and through him condemnation has come upon us all. Moreover, we have all increased our guilt and condemnation by our own personal transgressions. But God willed not that we would perish, and therefore sent his only dear Son to deliver us: and, having opened a way for our return to him through the blood and righteousness of his Son, he has published the glad tidings, and offered freely to give eternal life to as many as would receive it in his appointed way. He has not offered it to us as a blessing to be earned or merited, but as a free unmerited gift to be received. See [Romans 6:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 6.23). [Ephesians 2:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 2.8-9). [Titus 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Titus 2.5).

***~~2. That "this life is in his Son"—~~***

This life, comprehending all the blessings of grace and glory, is in Christ as the *Proprietor*, the *Dispenser*, and the *Guardian*of it. For this just and elegant mode of expressing this idea, the Author is indebted to that very judicious author, Mr. Robert Walker, of Edinburgh; whose four volumes of Sermons are well worthy of every man's perusal.

Jesus is the PROPRIETOR of life. As the light is primarily in the sun, so is all good originally and essentially in Christ. "In him was life," says John, "and the life was the light of men, [John 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.4)." The same writer says of him again at the conclusion of the chapter from whence the text is taken, "This is the true God, and eternal life, verse 20."

Jesus also is the DISPENSER of life. As life was in him essentially as well as in the Father, so was it committed to him officially, in order that he might impart it to whoever he would, [Colossians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 1.19). [John 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 5.21); [John 5:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 5.26); [John 17:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 17.2). He himself arrogates to himself this honor, [John 10:28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 10.28); and all his Apostles acknowledge themselves indebted to him for all that they possessed, [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.16).

Jesus is moreover the GUARDIAN of life. When life was entrusted to Adam, he, though perfect, and in Paradise, was soon robbed of it through the devices of Satan. And if it were now committed to us, we in our present fallen state would not be able to preserve it one single hour. God has therefore graciously committed it to his dear Son, that, by being "hid with Christ in God, [Colossians 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 3.3)," it might be inaccessible to our subtle enemy.

By this mysterious, this merciful dispensation, "our souls are bound up, as it were, in the bundle of life with the Lord our God, [1 Samuel 25:29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Sam 25.29)." Christ "lives in us, [Galatians 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 2.21)," and "is our very life, [Colossians 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 3.4);" and hence, "because he lives," and as long as he lives, "we shall live also, [John 14:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 14.19)."

Thus has God testified, that eternal life is to be sought as a free gift from him, and to be only in, and through, and for the sake of, the Lord Jesus Christ. But to see the full importance of this record, we must consider,

***~~II. The declaration grounded upon it—~~***

A more solemn declaration is not to be found in all the inspired volume. But let us consider,

***~~1. What is meant by "having the Son of God?"~~***

The more simply this is explained, the more intelligible it will appear. Christ is represented as God's gift to man, [John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 3.16); [John 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 4.10); and we then receive that gift when we believe in Christ; or, in other words, when we receive him for all the ends and purposes for which he is given. This is the explanation which John himself gives us, [John 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.12); and consequently we may then be said to "have" Christ, when we have received him, and are making use of him, as the source and substance of our spiritual life.

***~~2. What depends on our "having" the Son of God—~~***

***~~Behold! nothing less than everlasting happiness or misery depends on this point.~~***

He who has felt a desire after eternal life; and has sought it earnestly through Christ; and has received it from God as a free unmerited gift; and is looking to Christ to impart it to him yet "more abundantly, [John 10:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 10.10)," and to preserve it in his soul; he who thus "lives by faith in the Son of God," has both a title to life, and the very beginning and pledge of eternal life in his soul. He can claim eternal life upon the footing of God's Word. He can plead the promises of God, [John 6:40](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 6.40); and may be fully assured that he shall not be disappointed of his hope, [Isaiah 45:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 45.17). Indeed he has eternal life already begun in his soul, [John 6:47](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 6.47). He was once dead like others; but now he "has passed from death unto life! [John 5:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 5.24)." The very act of living by faith in the Son of God proves to a demonstration, that he is alive, and that Christ lives in him! See [Galatians 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 2.21). He may not indeed have a comfortable sense and assurance of his happy state; but he really lives, and shall live for ever.

On the other hand, he who has not so received and lived upon the Lord Jesus Christ, has no life in his soul: he is yet "dead in trespasses and sins:" and, so far from having any title to life, he is under a sentence of condemnation, and "the wrath of God abides on him, [John 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 3.18); [John 3:36](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 3.36)." "Not having the Son of God, he has not life." Whatever he may have, he has not life. He may have learning, riches, honor, and even morality itself, according to the general acceptance of the term, but he has not life: and if he dies in his present state, he must perish forever! Yes, if he were the first monarch upon earth, he would in this respect be on a level with the basest of his subjects; he would descend from his pinnacle of honor, to the lowest abyss of shame and misery.

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How plain is the way of salvation!~~***

Supposing the way of salvation to be such as has been already stated, how can words express it more clearly than it is expressed in the text? There is no learning requisite to explain it: it is level with the comprehension of the most unlettered man in the universe. *Nothing is requisite for the understanding of it but humility of mind, and a willingness to be indebted for everything to the free grace of God in Christ Jesus*. If there be any difficulty, it arises only from the pride of our hearts that would mix something of our own with the finished work of Christ. The fact is, that salvation by faith alone is so plain and simple, that we are offended at it on account of its plainness and simplicity, [2 Kings 5:10-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Kings 5.10-14). But let the weak rejoice, that what is hidden from the wise, is revealed to them! [Matthew 11:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 11.25).

***~~2. How suitable is the way of salvation!~~***

If salvation had to be merited and earned by our good works, who among us could have entertained a hope? If our works, imperfect as they are, were to have eked out the merits of Christ, who could tell us the precise quantity and quality of the works that would have sufficed? In what doubt and suspense must we have been held all our days! And how would this way of salvation have suited persons in the situation of the dying thief, who are called away without having sufficient time to "make up their quota of bricks?" But a gift is suitable to all: a free salvation commends itself to all: and the more humbled we are under a sense of our own guilt and weakness, the more suitable will it appear, that we would receive all from Christ, and give all the glory of our salvation to him.

***~~3. What infatuation is it to substitute any other plan of salvation in the place of that which God has offered us!~~***

Suppose for one moment (though it is a horrid and blasphemous supposition) that we were wiser than God, and that we knew better than he did what was fit for him to do; still are we also "stronger than he?" Can we oblige him to alter his decrees? Vain hope! We may entertain as strong prejudices as we will, and load the Gospel with opprobrious names; still that will be true and irreversible, "He who has the Son, has life; and he who has not the Son of God, has not life." Let all of us then cease to weave a spider's web, and accept with gratitude "the salvation that is in Christ Jesus."

***~~#2468~~***

***~~USE OF THE SCRIPTURES TO BELIEVERS~~***

***~~[1 John 5:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 5.13)~~***

"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life."

The Scriptures of the New Testament were written doubtless for the whole world. Yet perhaps we may say, that *the Gospels were written more immediately for unbelievers, in order to convince them of the Messiahship of Jesus; and that the epistles were written rather for believers, to bring them to a life befitting their high and holy calling*. This idea seems to be sanctioned by John: for, at the end of his Gospel, he says, "These are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that, believing, you might have life through his name, [John 20:31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 20.31)." But, at the end of this epistle, he says, "These things have I written unto you who believe on the name of the Son of God." In truth, he had in his mind all the different classes of believers—children, young men, and fathers: "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for His name's sake. I write unto you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one, [1 John 2:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 2.12-14)." Of course, there is much in this, as well as in all the epistles, profitable to unconverted men: but I must, on the present occasion, attend rather to believers, and mark of what use this epistle is intended to be to them. It is intended,

***~~I. To assure them that in Christ they have all that they can need—~~***

All who truly believe "have eternal life!" They have,

***~~1. The substance of eternal life, treasured up for them in Christ—~~***

The Lord Jesus Christ is the depository in which eternal life is placed: as the Apostle says in the preceding context, "This is the record, that God has given to us eternal life; and this life is in his Son." The Lord Jesus purchased it for us, by his own obedience unto death: and to him it was granted, for our use and benefit, "that he might bestow it on as many as have been given him by the Father, [John 17:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 17.2)." "In Him, through the good pleasure of the Father, it dwells, even all the fullness of it, [Colossians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 1.19)." "Whatever can be conceived to be comprehended in eternal life, to him it is all committed; and out of his fullness it must be received, [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.16)."

***~~2. A title to eternal life, conferred on them by Christ—~~***

The Lord Jesus, when he sent forth his disciples with the Gospel to the whole world, commissioned them to declare to all, without exception, "He who believes, and is baptized, shall be saved." No one was required to bring any measure of worthiness with him as a title: on the contrary, there was to be but one plea for all mankind; namely, the promise of God to the believing soul. On that all were to rest; and that was to be the one ground of hope to every man. Life was to be, "not of works, but of grace, [Ephesians 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 2.8);" and "it was to be by faith, that it might be by grace, [Romans 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 4.16)." The only thing required on our part, was to receive thankfully what God offered freely in the Son of his love. In receiving Christ therefore by faith, we have a title to everything else; according as it is said, "All things are yours; and you are Christ's."

***~~3. The actual possession of eternal life, derived to them from Christ—~~***

Of this, also, the Apostle speaks strongly in the preceding context: "He who has the Son, has life: and he who has not the Son of God, has not life:" that is, life is the exclusive possession of the believing soul. This is no less plainly affirmed by our Lord himself: "Truly, truly, I say unto you, He who hears my words, and believes in him who sent me, has everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but has passed from death unto life! [John 5:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 5.24)." Whatever is comprehended in all the glory and felicity of Heaven, is now begun in the believer's soul: "He has the witness of it in himself, verse 10;" yes, and "the earnest" and foretaste of it, [Ephesians 1:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 1.13-14). In fact, as an embryo in the womb has all the parts of which manhood is the perfection, so *grace is glory begun; and glory is grace consummated!*

But the Scriptures are of yet further use to believers,

***~~II. To confirm and augment their trust in him—~~***

It is necessary that they would grow in faith, as well as in every other grace, [2 Thessalonians 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Thess 1.3). The faith of all should daily become,

***~~1. More simple in its exercise—~~***

The world at large have very little idea how difficult it is to exercise a pure "sincere faith." It is easy to say, 'I believe:' but to "renounce all confidence in the flesh" is inconceivably difficult. A stone does not more naturally fall to the ground, than we cleave to our own wisdom, strength, and righteousness, as grounds of hope, and sources of acceptance before God.

*To derive all from the Lord Jesus Christ, and depend on Him alone, as an infant on its mother's care, is the very summit of Christian maturity.*And where is the person that has attained to it? But, to aid us in this attainment, the Holy Scriptures are of wonderful use: *they show us the fullness that is in Christ, and the emptiness of the creature*, that is only as "a broken cistern, that can hold no water:" and they set before us all the great and precious promises of our reconciled God, who has engaged to "work all his works in us," and to "perfect that which concerns us." After being made to feel, in ten thousand instances, the weakness of human nature, we are made at last to "have our strength in the Lord alone, [Ephesians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 6.10)," and to be willing that "his strength would be perfected in our weakness, [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 12.9)."

***~~2. More firm in its actings—~~***

Our faith, when tried, is apt to waver. *Peter*, when the waves began to rise, brought on himself this just rebuke, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" And *Sarah*too "laughed" through unbelief, when, at her advanced age, she was taught to expect a progeny, and to become a mother of nations. Yes, and *Abraham*himself, through the weakness of his faith, repeatedly desired Sarah to deny her relation to him, lest an acknowledgment of it would lead to his ruin.

Thus we all find it, when we come into heavy trials. But by seeing in the Scriptures what God has done for his people in every age, and what he has engaged to do for them even to the end of the world, we learn, at last, to trust our God in all possible circumstances, and to be "strong in faith, giving glory to God, [Romans 4:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 4.20)."

***~~3. More uniform in its operations—~~***

Faith ought not to consist in occasional acts, but to be one continued habit of the mind. The believer would live upon the Lord Jesus Christ, as a branch upon the vine. Whether winds or frosts menace its existence, the branch still cleaves to the stock, and derives from it the sap which is necessary to its preservation. Just so must the believer cleave to the Lord Jesus Christ; and say with the Apostle, "I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who has loved me, and given himself for me! [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 2.20)." In himself he must "be dead," if I may so speak; and "his life must be hidden with Christ in God:" it is by having "Christ as his life," that he will insure his future "appearance with Christ in glory! [Colossians 3:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 3.3-4)."

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

***~~1. Study then, my brethren, the blessed Word of God—~~***

"Search the Scriptures," says our blessed Lord, "for in them you think you have eternal life: and they testify of me, [John 5:39](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 5.39)." Yes, "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy," and of the whole Scriptures, [Revelation 19:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 19.10). It is in them that you will behold his whole character portrayed; and by them will you have his whole work carried on and perfected within you, [Ephesians 5:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 5.26). [John 17:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 17.17).

Study them, then, with prayer. *Nothing will be gained from reading the Scriptures without prayer.*From human compositions, you may acquire all that they contain by the mere force of intellectual exertion: but the Scriptures are "a sealed book," until God himself shall open them to your minds. But, if God shines upon his word, and enables you to comprehend the truths contained in it, you will derive from thence such views of Christ, as shall change you into the Divine image, and "fill you with all the fullness of God [Ephesians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 3.18-19)." "As new-born babes, then, desire the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, [1 Peter 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Pet 2.2)."

***~~2. Apply to yourselves everything that is the proper object of faith—~~***

All the glory of Heaven is unfolded in the Scriptures to the believing soul. Make the Scriptures, then, a ladder, whereby to ascend to Heaven! Go thither, and there "behold him who is invisible, [Hebrews 11:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 11.27)." There get a sight of his covenant: there see your own "name written in the Lamb's book of life." There survey the throne prepared for you, with the crown of glory, and the golden harp already tuned for your touch. Survey it all as yours—your property, your portion, your inheritance. Rise thus upon the wings of faith, and all that is here on earth will vanish from before your eyes, or become like a mere speck in the unbounded regions of space.

This is the proper office of faith; and this is the privilege of the believing soul, even to have "your citizenship in Heaven, [Philippians 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 3.20);" and to occupy "your seat there with Christ, [Ephesians 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 2.6)," almost as you will do when you shall be personally dwelling in the realms of bliss. Truly, it is no lowly thing to be a Christian. If you believe in Christ, "all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours; and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's! 1 Corinthians 3:21-23."

***~~#2469~~***

***~~ANSWERS TO PRAYER~~***

***~~[1 John 5:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 5.14-15)~~***

"This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him."

Prayer is universally acknowledged to be a service proper for sinful men to perform; yet few have any just idea of its efficacy. If a man were to speak of having received an answer to his prayers, he would be considered as an enthusiast, who was deceiving his own soul. Yet it is clear that we are taught to expect answers from Almighty God, and that too even in relation to the specific petitions which we have presented before him. The words which we have just read abundantly attest to this, and naturally lead me to show,

***~~I. The confidence which a believer may enjoy in drawing near to God—~~***

***~~1. The Christian may possess a confidence respecting the acceptance of his prayers in general—~~***

God has been pleased to make himself known to us under this very character, "A God that hears prayer, [Psalm 65:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 65.2)." And in the most explicit terms has he assured us, that "no man shall seek his face in vain, [Isaiah 45:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 45.19)." "Ask, and you shall have; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it shall be opened, [Matthew 7:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 7.7-8)." In truth, if this hope were not held out to us, it would be in vain to approach our God at all.

Thus far, therefore, the world at large will admit the efficacy of prayer: they will acknowledge that some good will proceed from it; though their idea is, that the benefit will accrue rather from the meritoriousness of the act of prayer, than from any attention paid to the prayer itself. But we must go further, and assert that,

***~~2. The Christian may possess a confidence respecting specific answers to each particular petition—~~***

This is plainly declared in the passage before us, and therefore it may certainly be expected. But here it will be proper to mark the different limitations with which the subject must be understood. If these are not carefully noted, I grant that much error may prevail in relation to it; but if these are kept in view, we may take to ourselves all the comfort which this subject is calculated to convey.

First, then, the text itself limits our petitions, and supposes them to be in accordance with the will of God: "If we ask anything according to his will." It would be absurd to imagine that we could, by any request of ours, prevail on the Deity to do anything which was contrary to his will. This limit, therefore, must be admitted of course.

Besides, our prayers must be offered in the name of Jesus Christ. He is our Mediator; nor is there any access to God for us, except through him. Hence he himself, in order to the acceptance of our prayers, requires that they be offered in his name, [John 14:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 14.13-14); [John 16:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 16.23); [John 16:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 16.26).

They must also be offered up in faith. A man that doubts and "wavers in his petitions must not expect to receive anything from the Lord, [James 1:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James 1.5-7)." Our Lord therefore declares this to be essential, "Whatever you ask in prayer, *believing*, you shall receive, [Matthew 21:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 21.22)." And peculiarly strong is his declaration in another place, where he says, "Whatever things you desire, when you pray, *believe*that you receive them, and you shall have them, [Mark 11:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark 11.24)."

Our prayers, too, must be presented with a pure and holy end; not for the gratification of any unhallowed feeling of our own, but with a view to the honor of our God, [James 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James 4.3).

Moreover as proper limits must be assigned to our prayers, so a proper latitude must be conceded to God for his answers to them. He is not bound in relation to the time when he shall answer them, or the manner in which he shall answer them. He may allow us to wait long before he answers us; so that we may feel the deeper need of his mercy, and be better prepared to receive it, and be led more devoutly to praise him when he has answered.

In answering us, too, it must be left to him to grant what, in his infinite wisdom, he may judge most conducive to our best welfare. "He heard his dear Son always;" yet he did not take the bitter cup out of his hands; but enabled him to drink it, [Matthew 26:39](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 26.39), and took it out of the hands of a dying world. He did not extract the thorn from the flesh of his servant Paul; but he made use of it, to prevent the risings of pride, which would have been an infinitely sorer plague; and enabled him to rejoice and glory in it, as the means of honoring more abundantly his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 12.9). Even to an angel he refused the specific request; but "answered him with good and comfortable words," which were eventually a more suitable and substantial blessing, [Zechariah 1:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 1.12-13).

Take these *limitations*, then, with respect to our prayers, and these *exceptions*respecting God's answers to them; and then we need not fear to entertain the confidence described in our text: we may not only be "sure that God hears us, but we either have, or shall have, the petitions that we desired of him."

And now you will readily see,

***~~II. The encouragement which this affords him to abound in that duty—~~***

What is there that man can need at the hands of God? Whatever it may be, he is at liberty to ask it: and may be confident, that, in answer to his petitions, it shall be granted to him.

***~~1. Do you need the forgiveness of your sins?~~***

Call them to remembrance from your earliest infancy, and spread them all before him. Fear not, either on account of their number or malignity; but go with confidence to your God, in the name of Jesus; and "he will blot them out as a morning cloud," and "cast them all behind him, into the very depths of the sea! [Isaiah 44:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 44.22). [Micah 7:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 7.19)."

***~~2. Do you need a supply of grace, to sanctify your soul?~~***

Look not at the inveteracy of your lusts, as though they were too great to be subdued; but look rather at the extent of God's gracious promises; and expect that he will enable you to "cleanse yourselves 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/esv/2 Cor 7.1)." Restrain not prayer before him; and he will transform you into "his perfect image, even from glory to glory," "by the mighty working of his Spirit, who raised Christ himself from the dead, 2 Corinthians 3:18. [Ephesians 1:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 1.19-20)."

***~~3. Do you need all the glory and blessedness of Heaven?~~***

"Be not straitened in yourselves, my brethren; for you are not straitened in God." He himself says to you, "Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it! [Psalm 81:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 81.10);" and therefore spread before him your every need, assured that, as he is able, so also is he willing, to "give you exceeding abundantly above all that you can ask, or even think! [Ephesians 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 3.20)."

If it is said, that such confidence is not warranted at this day, I ask, Are our privileges diminished under the Christian dispensation? Are we less entitled to expect these blessings, than the Jews were, under their less perfect economy? I grant, that we are not authorized to expect such visible interpositions as they enjoyed: but ours shall not be a whit less real, or less certain. We have not the Urim and Thummim, whereby to consult God, and obtain an answer that shall be legible by acknowledged marks upon the breast-plate; but God will nevertheless hear us when we call upon him; and cause us also, in doubtful circumstances, to hear a voice behind us, saying, "This is the way—walk in it!" Though therefore I acknowledge, that, as being under a theocracy, the Jews enjoyed privileges peculiar to themselves, I affirm that, so far as those privileges will conduce to our spiritual welfare, we possess them in as high a degree as ever they did; and it is our own fault if we avail not ourselves of them, for the advancement of our souls in peace, in holiness, and in glory.

Did the Prophet Elijah shut and open the windows of Heaven? it is recorded to show the efficacy of prayer, for whatever it be made, and by whoever it be offered, [James 5:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James 5.16-18).

***~~I would not however conclude without suggesting a CAUTION, in reference to your exercise of this confidence—~~***

Take care to exercise it with modesty and holy fear. It is possible enough to mistake our own feelings for an answer to prayer; and to persuade ourselves that God is directing us, when we are following only the imaginations of our own hearts. Let us, on all occasions, take the written word for our guide; and, in all doubtful circumstances, wait the outcome, before we presume to refer them to God as expressions of his will in answer to our prayers. The truth in our text is to be improved rather for our encouragement to commit our ways to God, than for the purpose of determining positively what God has done, or will do. Let us take it with this limitation, that God will fulfill our requests, if they will really conduce to our welfare and to his glory; and then we cannot err, nor can our confidence ever be misplaced.

***~~#2470~~***

***~~THE CHRISTIAN'S KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST~~***

***~~[1 John 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 5.20)~~***

"We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true—even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life."

It is thought by many that the doctrines of the Gospel are uncertain speculations, and that the experience of them in the soul is nothing more than an enthusiastic conceit. We acknowledge that the mysteries of religion are in many respects beyond the grasp of our reason; and that the inward feelings arising from them can be judged of by those only in whose bosom they are found: yet neither the one nor the other can on this account be considered as uncertain. On the contrary, whenever they are mentioned in the Scriptures, they are spoken of as matters that are plain and unquestionable.

In the text, and the two verses that precede it, the Apostle thrice repeats the assertion, "We know." "We know that he who is born of God sins not." "We know that we are of God." And then, in reference both to the Gospel itself, and to his experience of its truth, he adds a third time, "We know that the Son of God has come," etc.

From these words we shall be led to notice three things which Christians know in relation to their Lord and Savior:

***~~I. His advent—~~***

***~~The first Christians knew assuredly that the Messiah was come—~~***

To state all the grounds of their conviction would be superfluous, and indeed impossible in a single sermon. We shall confine ourselves to those which were most obvious and incontrovertible, namely, the *prophecies*that were accomplished in him, and the *miracles*that were wrought by him.

When they saw that so many, so various, so minute, and (to appearance) so contradictory prophecies all united in him, and were fulfilled by him, they could not doubt but that Jesus was the person to whom they all referred.

When, moreover, they beheld such numerous, such undoubted, such benevolent, and such stupendous miracles wrought by him in confirmation of his word, it was impossible for them to withhold their assent to the justice of his claims, unless they were altogether blinded by Satan and their own lusts.

***~~But we have, if possible—yet clearer evidence than these—~~***

Many of the most remarkable prophecies were either not quite accomplished, or but just accomplished, when our Lord died; so that the fulfillment of them might then be questioned. But who can doubt whether Daniel's weeks of years, [Daniel 9:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan 9.24), have not expired many centuries ago? Who can doubt whether "the scepter which was not to depart from Judah, until Shiloh would come, [Genesis 49:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 49.10)," has not departed long since? Who can doubt whether the second "Temple to which the Messiah was to come, [Malachi 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 3.1)," has not long since been demolished?

But a further and most satisfactory proof of Christ's Messiahship is that *his Gospel was propagated so extensively, in so short a time, by such instruments, in opposition to all the prejudices and passions of mankind; and that, though every effort of men and devils has been exerted to root out Christianity from the earth, none have ever been able to prevail against the Church*.

On these grounds then, in addition to the former, we may say, "We know that the Son of God has come."

Moreover, we know also,

***~~II. His character—~~***

Many had been the impostors who had laid claim to the title of the Messiah. In opposition to all of these, the Apostle twice designates our Lord as "the true, the only true," Messiah; and, in the close of the text, specifies more particularly,

***~~1. His personal character—~~***

Jesus is "the true God." John, more than all the Apostles, seems to have been studious to assert the divinity of Christ. With this he opens his history of Jesus: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, [John 1:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.1)." The whole Scriptures also concur to establish this important doctrine, that he who was "a Son born, was also the mighty God, [Isaiah 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 9.6);" that he was Emmanuel, "God with us, [Matthew 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 1.23);" even "God manifest in the flesh, [1 Timothy 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Tim 3.16)," yes, "God over all blessed for ever! [Romans 9:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 9.5)." Nothing can be more clear than this fundamental point. Indeed the very name, "Son of God," so far from militating against his equality with the Father, was in the apprehension of the Jews themselves an assertion of that equality, [John 5:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 5.18).

***~~2. His official character—~~***

Christ, as God, has life in himself essentially, [John 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.4); [John 5:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 5.26); but he is also "the Author of eternal salvation" to all his followers, [Hebrews 5:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 5.9). As there is no other God but he, so is there no other Savior, [Acts 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 4.12). It was he who purchased eternal life for us. None can claim any part of his glory in this respect: "his life was the ransom paid for us;" and by his obedience unto death we obtain righteousness and life. Moreover it is he who imparts eternal life to us: we receive it from him, who "is exalted to give it," and from "whose fullness alone it can be received."

As we cannot merit it, so neither can we obtain it by any efforts of our own: it is purely the gift of God through Christ, [Romans 6:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 6.23); and Christ, as "Head over all things to the Church," bestows it on whoever he will, [John 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 5.21); [John 10:28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 10.28). We know from Christ's own express assertion (and stronger evidence than that we cannot have), that he is "the way, the truth, and the life, [John 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 14.6);" and to all eternity shall we ascribe our salvation "to him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood! [Revelation 1:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 1.5-6)."

But it is yet further the privilege of all Christ's followers to know,

***~~III. Their saving interest in him—~~***

The knowledge which his people have of him is not a mere speculative acquaintance with his history, but an intimate connection, or rather, a oneness with him, [John 17:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 17.21).**Christians are "in Christ"**

***~~1. Christians are "in Christ" by a federal relation—~~***

As Adam was a head and representative to all his descendants, so is Christ to all his spiritual seed, [1 Corinthians 15:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 15.22). They have communion with him in all his transactions upon earth, and in Heaven. They are circumcised in him, baptized in him, dead with him, quickened with him, risen with him, seated in Heaven with him, [Romans 6:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 6.4); [Romans 6:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 6.8). [Colossians 2:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 2.12-13). [Ephesians 2:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 2.5-6). We cannot indeed be said to have done or suffered the same things as Christ, (for to assert that we had fulfilled the law, or made atonement for sin, would be blasphemy,) yet by virtue of our relation to him as our Head and Representative, *everything which he either did or suffered, is, as far as respects the beneficial effects of it, considered as though we had done or suffered it*. And on this account we may claim, on the footing of justice as well as of mercy, all that he purchased for us, and merited on our behalf! [Romans 3:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 3.25-26). 1 [John 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.9)."

***~~2. Christians are "in Christ" by a vital union—~~***

The union of a member with the head, [Colossians 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 2.19), or of a branch with the vine, [John 15:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 15.1), justly characterizes our union with Christ. Separate from him, we can do nothing, [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 15.5); we can perform no one act, of the spiritual life, nor bring forth any spiritual fruit. The body and the soul are not more closely united than Christ and his people: he lives in them, [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 2.20); he is their very life, [Colossians 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 3.4); they are one spirit with him, [1 Corinthians 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 6.17).

Now this, no less than their federal relation to Christ, is known to all true Christians. They do not indeed at all times equally enjoy a sense of it in their minds; but, in proportion as they live near to God in the exercise of faith and love, they "have the witness of these things within, themselves, [1 John 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 5.10)." Temptation or sin may so weaken the assurance, that it shall be scarcely discerned: but when these obstructions are removed, and the believer is walking closely with God, a holy confidence will almost invariably crown his labors, and fill his soul with peace, 1 [John 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 3.21).

***~~We shall conclude this subject with answering two questions:~~***

***~~1. How do Christians obtain this knowledge?~~***

The text informs us: It is not from human teaching, or the power of reason, that this light springs up in the soul: it is Christ who "gives us an understanding to know him." He, who opened the heart of Lydia, [Acts 16:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 16.14), and the understandings of his own Apostles, [Luke 24:45](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 24.45), enlightens the minds of believers at this day, and "reveals unto babes and sucklings the things that are hidden from the wise and prudent, [Matthew 11:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 11.25)." If then we would obtain this knowledge, let us not lean to our own understanding, but pray to him to open our eyes, and to "guide us into all truth".

***~~2. What benefit do Christians derive from it?~~***

A merely *speculative*knowledge of Christianity expands the mind, and leads it to high and heavenly contemplations. But no tongue can utter the benefits arising from an *experimental acquaintance*with Christ. What just views does it give us of everything in the world! What peace does it bring into the conscience! How does it disarm death of its sting! And what bright prospects does it open to us in the eternal world! O let a desire after the full blessings of salvation animate us in our inquiries after truth! Let us seek to have more enlarged views of Christ, and of our interest in him; and thus shall we be prepared for that complete vision of his glory, in comparison with which our present knowledge is but as a candle before the sun!

***~~3 JOHN~~***

***~~#2471~~***

***~~A MINISTER'S CHIEF JOY~~***

***~~[3 John 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/3 John 1.4)~~***

"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."

There exists between a minister and his people a relation which may not unfitly be compared with that of a father and his children. The metaphorical expression of a father is more strictly applicable to those whom a minister "has begotten through the Gospel, [1 Corinthians 4:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 4.15);" but it needs not to be restricted to this sense. It may be used with greater latitude in reference to those over whom a minister watches, and for whose benefit he labors, with parental concern, especially where the person to whom the paternal relation is ascribed is somewhat advanced in years.

It would seem that Gaius, to whom John wrote this epistle, was converted to the faith by the ministry of Paul, [1 Corinthians 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 1.14); yet John properly includes him among his children, because he felt the same regard for him as for those who were the more immediate seals of his own ministry; the whole body of his people being in his different epistles frequently designated by that favorite appellation, [1 John 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 2.1); [1 John 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 3.18).

Respecting the state of Gaius' soul, the Apostle had heard the most satisfactory account; so that he could not show his concern for the bodily health of Gaius more strongly, than by wishing it to prosper in every respect, verse 2, "even as his soul prospered." Having declared the joy which this information had afforded him, he states, in general, that he had no greater joy than what arose from such tidings as these.

From hence we shall take occasion to show,

***~~1. What is the great object of a minister's desire in behalf of his people—~~***

To bring men to the acknowledgment of the truth is the first labor of a minister: and, until that has been effected, no other relation exists between him and them than that which he has by nature, or that which he has in common with all mankind. But when they have embraced the truth, and have become members of the family of Christ, then the minister seeks their advancement in the divine life.

Christianity, as experienced in the soul, is not a sentiment, but a habit of life. It not merely informs the mind, but regulates the life: and, while it brings "men from darkness unto light, it turns them also from the power of Satan unto God." Having brought souls to an enjoyment of Christ, and to a conformity to his mind and will, the minister desires to see them walk in the truth,

***~~1. Consistently—~~***

He longs to behold in them a holy consistency; a high state of heavenly affections, and a careful attention to the duties of morality. Morality however will not satisfy him if detached from piety: nor will the most sublime piety approve itself to him, if it is not accompanied with a conscientious discharge of every personal and relative duty.

***~~2. Steadily—~~***

In them he expects to find a steadiness that bids defiance to temptation, and cannot be diverted from its purpose, either by the allurements of sense or the terrors of persecution. He would have his converts to be "steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, [1 Corinthians 15:58](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 15.58)."

A fixedness of mind he regards as absolutely essential to the Christian character; and he is never satisfied with the state of his people unless he finds that, in the midst of the severest persecutions, they are enabled to say, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto me, so that I may but finish my course with joy".

***~~3. Progressively—~~***

This is implied in the term "walking," which is a progressive motion necessary to the Christian life.*There is no possibility of standing still in religion*. Our motion, if not progressive, must be retrograde.

Now, as a parent wishes to see in his children a gradual advancement towards maturity both in their bodily and intellectual faculties, so does a minister long for his people's progress towards maturity. He hopes to see in them a more entire devotedness of heart unto their God and Savior; evincing itself in:

a greater spirituality of mind,

an increasing indifference to the things of time and sense,

and a more laborious engagement in every good work.

In a word, he wishes to see their progress like that of the sun in the firmament, "their path shining brighter and brighter unto the perfect day! [Proverbs 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 4.18)."

The emotions with which John beheld this conduct in Gaius were most sublime: and such they will be in every faithful minister; as will appear, while we show,

***~~II. Why it is that the attainment of that object fills him with such exalted joy—~~***

John was not inferior to any one of the Apostles in holy joy. He had been pre-eminently favored by his Lord and Savior, insomuch that he was known by the name of "the disciple whom Jesus loved." He had beheld his Lord transfigured on Mount Tabor, and shining forth in all the glory of the Godhead. He had lain in the bosom of his Lord, as on many other occasions, so especially on that evening, when the commemorative ordinance of the Lord's supper was instituted. Yet "he had no greater joy than to hear that his children walked in truth."

Much more therefore may we expect that ministers, less favored than he, would have no joy more exalted than that which the sight or hearing of their people's prosperity affords them. This is their sublimest source of happiness:

***~~1. Because it is by this only that the ends of their ministry are answered—~~***

If the minister imparts to his children "the sincere milk of the word," it is, "that they may grow thereby." Or, if he sets before them "the stronger food" of the Gospel, it is, that those who are able to receive it may be the more nourished and strengthened for their future labors. If he sees no growth in them, "he stands in doubt" whether they have ever been truly and savingly converted to the Christian faith; and "he travails, as it were, a second time in birth with them, until Christ is fully and visibly formed in them, [Galatians 4:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 4.19-20)."

But when he beholds the plants, which he is daily watering, thriving, and diffusing all around the fragrancy of holy and devout affections, he sees of the travail of his soul and is satisfied: and what the angels enjoyed at the first signs of their conversion, he enjoys from day to day: his very life is bound up in their welfare; and "he then lives, when they stand fast in the Lord, [1 Thessalonians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Thess 3.8)."

***~~2. Because by this alone can God be glorified—~~***

*Nothing brings more dishonor to God than an inconsistent conduct in those who profess godliness.* The very name of God is often blasphemed through the misconduct of those who call themselves his peculiar people. The ungodly world are not content with condemning the offending individual, "they speak evil of the way of truth" itself, as though that countenanced and even produced the evils that have been committed.

On the other hand, "the person who brings forth much fruit glorifies God," and "by his well-doing puts to silence the ignorance of foolish men." To a minister who loves the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, and is jealous for the honor of his name, nothing can be more delightful than to see truth triumphing over error, and the kingdom of Christ exalted on the ruins of Satan's empire. On every fresh report that is brought to his ears, he will exclaim, "Hallelujah! for the Lord God omnipotent reigns!"

***~~3. Because without this they can have no hope of ever meeting their people in the realms of bliss—~~***

How joyful is the thought of that hour, when the minister shall go with his people into the presence of his God, saying, "Here I am, and the children you have given me!" And how glorious will be the recompense of his labors, when he shall "have them as his joy and crown of rejoicing" to all eternity! [1 Thessalonians 2:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Thess 2.19-20). If an earthly parent hears of his children, that they are advancing visibly in everything that is good, so that, though he has no hope of seeing them in this world, he feels assured that he shall meet them again at the right hand of God, and dwell with them for ever in his immediate presence—the thought of a temporary separation from them is swallowed up in the joy that the blessed prospect affords him.

So it is with the spiritual Parent, when beholding or hearing of the prosperity of his children: for he knows that he shall "rejoice in the day of Christ, that he has not run in vain, or labored in vain, [Philippians 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 2.16)."

***~~Permit me now to address you,~~***

***~~1. In a way of retrospective inquiry—~~***

What report must I hear of you? What report have you to give me of yourselves? Has your walk been consistent, uniform, progressive? Be assured, I am prepared to rejoice in your welfare with a truly paternal joy.

***~~2. In a way of prospective admonition—~~***

Great and manifold are your dangers, whatever progress you may have made. That you may escape them, "take heed to God's Word," and follow the steps of your blessed Lord and look to him for all needful strength. "Be strong in him," and you shall "be more than conquerors through him!"

***~~JUDE~~***

***~~#2472~~***

***~~Christ's Coming to Judgment~~***

***~~[Jude 1.14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jude 14), [15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jude 1.15)~~***

"Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him."

God has had in every age some to testify against the ungodly, and to warn them of the consequences of their sin at the future judgment: and though the faithful execution of this office meets with but ill returns from an ungrateful world, yet we trust there will be found, to the end of time, some, who will gladly suffer reproach or even death itself in the service of their God, and in the benevolent attempt to save their fellow-sinners from destruction.

We do not indeed hear of many who were witnesses for God, before the time of Moses; and even his warnings and exhortations were enforced principally with temporal sanctions: yet the certainty of a future judgment was known not only by Moses, but by the antediluvian world; and was solemnly urged by Enoch as a motive to repentance. This prophecy is not recorded in the Old Testament; but, by whatever means Jude attained the knowledge of it, whether by tradition, or by some written memorial, or by immediate inspiration, we may be sure that it was delivered by Enoch; and we may be thankful that such a precious fragment of inspired truth has been preserved to us.

It proclaims to us,

***~~I. The manner in which our Lord shall come to judgment.~~***

Christ, we are assured, is coming to judge the world.

There can be no reason to doubt that Enoch referred to Christ, even to that very "seed of the woman, who was to bruise the serpent's head," him he represents as coming to complete his victory over Satan and his agents by calling them to his tribunal, and by consigning them over to the punishment they have deserved.

The New Testament writers uniformly speak to the same effect: they declare that it is at the judgment seat of Christ we must stand; that it is Christ who is ordained to be the Judge of the living and the dead; and, that all judgment is therefore committed unto him, because he is the Son of man; or, in other words, that *he who died for sinners, shall, in that very nature that he assumed for them, be the immediate author of salvation to his followers and of condemnation to his enemies.*

And even the manner of his appearing is here plainly predicted.

It is not with "his saints," but with his holy ones, or holy angels, that he will come. The saints will not be his assessors in judgment until they themselves shall have received their sentence: then indeed "they shall judge angels;" but until then, they themselves will stand before him to be judged.

But the holy angels will be his attendants in the clouds of Heaven; all the "myriads" of them shall descend with him from their blessed abodes, to increase the solemnity of that day, and to honor him to whom they owe their very existence. This accords with the description given by Daniel, by Paul, and by Christ himself.

*How different will our Lord's appearance then be from what it was when he first visited our guilty world, and lay a helpless infant in the manger!* How earnestly should we now exert ourselves that we may he prepared to meet him!

That our minds may be raised to an expectation of that day, let us consider,

***~~II. The ends of his coming.~~***

It is not to display his own glory that Christ will come; but,

***~~1. To pass judgment upon the whole world.~~***

All, who have ever lived in this wretched world, shall be summoned before him. The old and the young, the rich and the poor, will all come forth out of their graves, and those that who be then living upon earth shall be changed in the twinkling of an eye, and all shall stand together at his tribunal. Every one shall then be tried as by fire; their actions shall then be weighed as in a balance; and the most secret motions of their hearts be brought to light. Then shall they that are approved, "have praise of God;" and they that are disapproved, be driven from his presence.

Nor will Jesus merely pronounce the sentence of condemnation or acquittal, but he will "execute" it himself, either exalting them instantly to thrones of glory, or casting them headlong into "the lake that burns with fire and brimstone!"

***~~2. To manifest the equity of his decisions.~~***

Whatever endeavors be now used to show men their guilt and danger, they have many things to allege in their own favor; nor even "if we could speak with the tongues of angels," could we bring home conviction to their hearts. But Jesus will show them, beyond all contradiction, the futility of their excuses: and will prove by such unquestionable evidence "the *deeds*they have committed, the *words*they have spoken," and the *thoughts*they have entertained, that they shall be silenced and confounded before him. The ministers, who once labored for their salvation, shall then be forced to bear testimony against them. Their companions in sin, though to their own confusion, must also testify of those deeds of darkness, which they once fondly hoped would be buried in eternal oblivion. The very places, where their most secret iniquities were committed, will stand forth to accuse them, than that they should escape with impunity. Above all, "God himself will be a swift witness against them," and will so thoroughly "convince" them of all their sins, whether of commission or of omission, that they shall be constrained to acknowledge the equity of that sentence which dooms them to everlasting burnings! Even in Hell will they be compelled to say, "Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are your judgments!"

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

***~~1. How needful is it that we should instantly begin our preparation for that day!~~***

Five thousand years ago the prophet spoke of Jesus as so near at hand, that it seemed as if he were already come; and it is in this way that all, whether Prophets or Apostles, have been inspired to speak. So strongly did Paul express himself on this subject that the Thessalonians conceived the judgment-day to be almost immediately at hand. In the same manner must we say, "The Lord is at hand!" "The Judge is at the door!" He surely is coming as soon as ever the events that are ordained to precede his advent shall have received their accomplishment.

With respect to us, it signifies little whether it is near or distant, since *as death leaves us, judgment will find us.*Is it not even madness then to delay our repentance, since we cannot tell but that death may come within the next year, or day, or hour?

Beloved, shall your Lord come, and find you sleeping? Is he hastening towards you, and will you not prepare to meet him? O awake from your slumbers, and turn to him with your whole hearts; so that you may "have confidence before him at his coming."

***~~2. How desirable is it to possess a saving interest in Christ!~~***

It surely is not necessary to prove that we are ungodly, since *we have all sinned, times without number, in thought, word, and deed, against the Divine Majesty.*Where then shall we go for the remission of our sins? How shall we get our iniquities blotted out from the book of his remembrance? Our tears, even if we could shed rivers of tears, will never avail for this end. *Nothing but the blood of Jesus can ever cleanse us from the guilt of one sin! And, if we are not washed in that fountain, we shall die in our iniquities, and lie under the guilt of them forever.* Let us then seek a saving interest in Christ. Let us never attempt to substitute any repentance or reformation of our own, in the place of his meritorious blood and righteousness: but let it be our one desire to "be found in him," and to obtain from him those garments of salvation, which alone can "cover the nakedness" of our guilty souls.

***~~3. With what confidence and comfort may believers look forward to the coming of their Lord!~~***

Whom will they have for their judge but the very person who bought them with his blood? The very person in whom they have believed; and to whom they cleaved with full purpose of heart? Be it so then; the catalogue of their sins shall be produced, a catalogue reaching, as it were, from Heaven to earth; and they shall not have one word to offer in arrest of judgment! Yet, will the Savior pass a sentence of condemnation upon them? Will he not himself stand forth and testify, "I saw their deep contrition; I treasured up their tears in my vial; I was witness to their frequent sighs and groans, and to their cries for mercy through my atoning blood," "Deliver them from going down into the pit! I paid their ransom," they were mine; and they manifested that they were mine, by their obedience to my will, and their conformity to my image! "Come, you blessed children of my Father, inherit my kingdom prepared for you!"

Fear not then, weak and trembling saints; but rather "be looking for and hastening to the coming of the day of Christ," you shall surely stand before him with joy; while they, who once justified their ungodliness, and thought, that to be among the godly was a fit matter for derision, shall bewail their folly, and confess the equity of the sentence that fixes you in Heaven, and themselves in Hell. Remember then with gratitude that you are to have Jesus for your judge; and when he says, "Behold, I come quickly!" let your hearts reply, "Even so, come Lord Jesus!"

***~~#2473~~***

***~~The Christian's Duties~~***

**[Jude 1:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jude 1.20-21)**

"But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life."

In every age there has prevailed in the Church a proneness to depart both from the principles and practice of the Gospel. Jude in his day, writing to the whole Christian Church respecting "their common salvation," says, "it was needful for him to write to them, and to exhort them all to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints."

At the same time he declares, that "ungodly men had crept in among the saints," and had not only grievously dishonored the Gospel, but had "turned the very grace of God itself into a license for sin," and vindicated their licentious practices as allowed and sanctioned by the Gospel of Christ.

Against the influence of such pernicious examples, the Apostle was anxious to preserve all who yet maintained their integrity. He bade them remember, that the Apostles of our Lord had from the beginning taught them to expect that such hypocrites and apostates would arise: and he exhorted them so to walk before God, that they might hold fast their steadfastness even to the end. The directions which he gave them were such as could not but approve themselves to their judgment, and commend themselves to their inmost souls.

The same dangers to the Church are existing still; and the same directions therefore are necessary for us, as well as for those in the apostolic age. Permit me then to call your attention to them:

***~~I. To the two former directives, as instrumental to your welfare.~~***

***~~"Build up yourselves, brethren, on your most holy faith."~~***

It is here supposed that you have embraced the faith, and that you are standing upon the true foundation which God himself has laid in Zion. But you must not be satisfied with having believed in Christ: for Paul says, "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."

Your faith is truly a "most holy faith," in its nature, in its tendency, and in all its practical effects, it is "most holy;" and to build up yourselves more and more upon it is your bounden duty. Seek then to advance continually in the knowledge of it, in all its bearings, and in all its relations. View the whole mystery as planned by Infinite Wisdom, and formed into a covenant of grace:

the *Father*undertaking to accept an atonement in our behalf;

the *Son*engaging to offer that atonement in his own sacred person;

and the *Holy Spirit*engaging to bring to Christ those who would be given him of the Father, and those whom Christ would purchase with his most precious blood.

Eternity itself will not suffice to explore the wonders contained in this mystery; and therefore, like the holy angels, we should incessantly be searching into it, with a view to comprehend, as far as our limited capacities can reach, the wisdom of God displayed in it.

We should seek to grow also in a simple reliance on the Gospel of Christ, as of itself perfectly suited to us, and altogether sufficient for the necessities of the whole world. It is impossible ever to be too jealous upon this head; since the mixing of anything with this foundation will subvert it utterly, and make void all that Christ has done and suffered for us.

In a realizing sense of its excellency, we should also be making higher and higher attainments. There is a *rest of the mind*, and a *satisfaction of the soul*, which it is our privilege to possess; and which, in its sublimer actings, approximates very nearly to the felicity of the saints above. There is no measure of this in which we should rest. We are told, that, by believing in Christ, we may be elevated to "a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory, and may already (by anticipation) receive the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls."

Yet not in these respects only, but in every possible view, we should "be building up ourselves on our most holy faith," and be daily manifesting our progress, and "making our profiting to appear" to all around us.

At the same time**be "praying continually in the Holy Spirit."**

Of ourselves we can do nothing: our sufficiency even for a good thought, must be of God alone: and from him it must be sought by earnest prayer. "He will be inquired of by us, before he will do for us" what in his covenant of grace he has promised to us. If we ask not, we cannot have: but, if we ask in faith, we shall have our joy increased to the full. We must therefore go to God continually; seeking from him in the first instance the "Spirit of grace and supplications," by whose gracious influences alone we can approach him in an acceptable manner, and pray to him as we ought. "That blessed Spirit will help our infirmities;" and though he may not give us that fluency of utterance, or that enlargement of heart, which we may desire, "he will make intercession in us with groanings which cannot be uttered," but which will enter the ears of our heavenly Father, "who knows the mind of the Spirit," and will answer the petitions which are so dictated by him.

We are not indeed to expect any *miraculous aid*from the Holy Spirit: but a *gracious influence*we may expect; as Paul says, "Pray always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit." Nor need we be concerned whether we address our God in words conceived at the moment, or in a pre-composed form: it is the frame of mind and heart which God regards: and, if that be spiritual, *our prayer, even though it consist only of a sigh, or a groan, shall come up with acceptance before him, and shall bring down into our souls all the blessings both of grace and glory.*

While then we are building up ourselves on our most holy faith, we must be "pouring out our hearts before him" through the assistance of his Spirit, and be bringing down from him such communications of grace and strength as our daily necessities require.

The beneficial tendency of the two former directions being thus clear and manifest, let me call your attention,

***~~II. To the two latter, as perfective of your welfare.~~***

***~~"Keep yourselves in the love of God."~~***

This was primary in the mind of the Apostle: the two preceding being urged only as conducive to it. And certainly this is the great object which every Christian should keep in view, and at which he should aim day and night. To have a sense of "God's love shed abroad in the heart;" to "have the light of his countenance lifted up upon us;" to be going to him continually as a Father; to "walk with him," as Enoch did; and, like Abraham, to commune with him as a friend; to "set him always before us;" to have no wish or desire but to please him; to be "delighting ourselves in him," as our God, our portion, our eternal great reward: this is our wisdom; this is our happiness; this is our security.

If we descend on lower ground, we are open to all manner of assaults: but who can reach us there? Who can break through to harm us, when we are "dwelling in God, and God is dwelling in us?" We are "encompassed as with a wall of fire;" we are in a fortress that is absolutely impregnable: we may defy the whole universe to "separate us from his loved."

Let me then especially urge upon you this important duty. Live not at a distance from God: rest not in a formal acknowledgment of him: but endeavor to "walk worthy of him unto all pleasing," get back, as far as possible, to the state of man in Paradise; and labor to walk as on the very borders of the eternal world. My beloved brethren, "let your conversation be thus in Heaven," and let all the faith which you exercise, and every prayer that you utter, be, as it were, a breeze to fill your sails, and bear you forward to your desired haven; that "you may never fall, but have an abundant entrance ministered unto you into the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

***~~"Look also for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."~~***

However close your walk with God may be, you must not on that account lean in the least degree to your own righteousness, but must rely entirely on the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, and expect "eternal life solely as the gift of God for Christ's sake." And for this you must be waiting, looking, longing, in a state of constant preparation, and of eager expectation. The very perfection of the Christian state on earth is this, to be "looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God." Of many in the Corinthian Church the Apostle says, "they came behind in no gift, waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

You then aspire after the same blessed attainment. "Let your loins be girt, and your lamps trimmed, and yourselves as those who wait for the coming of the heavenly Bridegroom;" that, when he shall come, you may "enter in with him to the marriage feast."

While you are in such a frame as this, all earthly things will lose their influence; and all attempts, whether of men or devils, to retard your progress be in vain. From my inmost soul therefore I would offer in behalf of you the prayer which Paul offered for the Thessalonian Church, the prayer which so remarkably coincides with that of Jude in my text, "May the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and a patient waiting for Christ."

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

Settle it in your minds that this is true religion. This is the state in which it is both your duty and your privilege to live—and so living you are sure of mercy, and cannot fail of attaining that eternal life which the Lord Jesus Christ has purchased for you.

***~~#2474~~***

***~~An Ascription of Praise to Jehovah~~***

**[Jude 1:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jude 1.24-25)**

"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."

By many this Doxology is considered as addressed to the Lord Jesus Christ: but though it is certain that by all the heavenly choir our most adorable Savior is worshiped as one with the Father, without any distinction whatever, and that he is to be honored in all respects by us precisely as the Father--yet we must be cautious never to strain any portion of Scripture for the purpose of honoring him; for, if we do, we give advantage to those who deny his proper Divinity, to represent all our worship of him as unauthorized and erroneous.

*The more fully we are assured of any doctrine, the more careful we should be not to establish it on a weak foundation*; lest, when the foundation on which we have indiscreetly built is shaken, we be led to doubt the truth of the doctrine itself. Of the Divinity of our blessed Lord we have no more doubt than of any other truth of our holy religion: but in the passage before us we apprehend, that it is not to Him in particular that this Doxology is addressed, but to the Father. For, in several other passages, the Father beyond all doubt is addressed, and under the same character as is here described. Paul concludes his Epistle to the Romans thus: "Now to him who is able to establish you, … to God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever." In the Epistle to the Ephesians he again speaks in similar terms: "Now unto him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, unto him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end." So again, in his First Epistle to Timothy he says, "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen."

Those who would apply our text to Christ, think that it must refer to him, because he alone (as they imagine) presents his Church before the presence of his Father's glory: as it is said, "He loved the Church and gave himself for it, … that he might present it to himself as a glorious Church, etc." But the very same thing is spoken of the Father also, of whom it is said, that, "by Christ, the Father reconciled all things to himself, … even in the body of his flesh through death, to present us holy and unblamable and unreprovable in his sight." I consider the text therefore as addressed to the Father: and, in order to a suitable improvement of it, will set before you,

***~~I. The character of Jehovah as here described.~~***

His *wisdom*and his *power*are altogether infinite: and we might, not improperly, speak of those two perfections as they are delineated in the Holy Scriptures. But I conceive, that, though mentioned generally in the text, we should notice them not as existing in himself, but as exercised towards his Church.

Wonderful is the wisdom which he has displayed in his dealings with his people.

Contemplate the *plan of salvation*through the incarnation and death of his only-begotten Son. What unfathomable depths of wisdom are here? Well is it called, "The wisdom of God in a mystery!" To contemplate that, will be the employment of eternity.

Nor, if we entered into his particular dispensations towards his people, would this perfection appear in less bright colors; so "unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out." The experience of every saint will furnish abundant matter for adoration through all eternity; for "he has abounded towards every one of them in all wisdom and prudence."

Nor is the power which he exercises towards them less stupendous.

View the temptations with which every saint is beset. View the enemies, even all the hosts of Hell, with whom he has to contend. View his utter incapacity to do anything of himself—and yet his conflicts, his victories, and his triumphs! Must not that power be wonderful that is able to keep him, and effectual for his preservation even to the end? Yes truly, it is no less a power than that which was put forth to raise the Lord Jesus Christ himself from the dead, and to exalt him above all the principalities and powers both of Heaven and Hell.

It is by the united and continued exercise of these two perfections of wisdom and power, that he becomes "our Savior."

In the name of "Savior" he glories; and under that character he loves to be viewed by us. His perfections would indeed be the same, though never put forth for us, any more than for the fallen angels: but, as they are so exercised for our welfare, it befits us to contemplate them in that particular view, and to render to him the praise which such manifestations of them demand.

Reflect a moment on him as a "Savior!" not merely as preserving us in our conflicts here, but as "presenting us faultless before the presence of his glory" in the world above—One moment's reflection upon his character in that view, will abundantly suffice to show you,

***~~II. The dispositions with which it should be contemplated.~~***

Beyond all doubt our hearts should be lifted up with most devout affection towards him, as the Apostle's was; and should be filled,

***~~1. With love.~~***

Review the character before described, and say whether, though you yourselves were not the objects of his care, the very existence of those perfections ought not to endear him to your souls? How much more then, when from all eternity they have been consecrated to your service, and destined to be exercised for your good! I call you then to love him with all your heart, and all your mind, and all your soul, and all your strength.

***~~2. With gratitude.~~***

Go to the world above, and see and hear how all the glorified saints are occupied around the throne: what songs of praise are they singing night and day to God, and to the Lamb! How do they all labor for utterance; and, by the very accumulation of the terms by which they strive to evince their gratitude, show how inadequate even the language of Heaven itself is to express the feelings of their hearts.

Thus then should it be with us: our whole life should be, as theirs is, one continued song of praise and thanksgiving! *Only consider what would have been your state at this hour, and to all eternity, if less wisdom or power had been put forth for you, and you will need no inducement to ascribe to him the glory due unto his name.*

***~~3. With trust.~~***

Where will you look for help, if not to him? Of whom besides can it be said that he has either wisdom or power to do such great things for you? With him alone is either wisdom or might sufficient for you. Go then to him: spread before him your every need: expect from him a supply in every hour of need, a supply suited to your wants and sufficient for your necessities. Never for a moment entertain a doubt of his kindness, his care, his all-sufficiency: for he is God, and not man; and therefore you have not been consumed hitherto, nor shall any enemy prevail against you. Only bear in mind that "He is for you;" and you may defy all the assaults both of earth and Hell.

***~~Conclusion.~~***

At the close of his Doxology, the Apostle adds, Amen! You must also add, *Amen!* in the very same spirit as he did, and in the same spirit that the angelic hosts are doing it above. And seek to live in this spirit every day, and all the day long. Then, when death shall call you hence, you shall change your place, but not your employment; your sorrows, but not your songs!