

THE
CHRISTIAN HEARER,

ABRIDGED.

BY EDWARD BICKERSTETH,
RECTOR OF WATTON, HERTS.

EDITED,

WITH ADDITIONAL MATTER,

BY

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&c. &c.

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THE CHRISTIAN HEARER.

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These things, beloved, we write unto you, not only to instruct you, but to remind ourselves: for we are enclosed in the same lists, and must engage in the same combat. Wherefore let us lay aside all vain and empty cares, and come up to the glorious and honorable rule of our holy calling. Let us consider what is good, and acceptable, and well pleasing in the sight of him that made us. Let us look stedfastly to the blood of Christ and see how precious his blood, shed for our salvation, is in the sight of God.

EPISTLE OF CLEMENT TO THE CORINTHIANS.

PREFACE OF THE AUTHOR.

THE Author was led to the subject of the following Treatise, in the discharge of his ministerial duty, by considering how very few in this vast metropolis, and throughout this favoured country, habitually hear the word, though preached in the very midst of them, in comparison of those who greatly or altogether neglect that duty; and how very few, even of habitual hearers, fully improve what they hear to their spiritual edification.

Multitudes both of rich and poor in this country, through their wilful neglect of the word of God, are as ignorant of the way of salvation, as though they had been born in a heathen land; with the awful aggravation of guilt, that they live in a country, to which God has in this day given a full share of scriptural truth.

The Author does not expect to remedy, on a large scale, the evil which he, in common with many, deploras: but if he can afford a little help, and stir up a few only to individual and practical reformation, it will be worth all his efforts.— And if he can excite Christians more fervently to pray for the full out-pouring of the Holy Spirit, far more extensive benefit may rise, even from this attempt, than can easily be anticipated.

May the Holy Spirit descend more and more on the church and on the world, and give efficacy to this and every attempt however feeble, to increase religious knowledge, and promote religious improvement, till at length *the knowledge of the glory of the Lord cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.*

Islington, Dec. 10, 1836.

CONTENTS.

Chap.	Page
I. The general Importance of Hearing the word	25
II. Preaching the Word the Special Ordinance of God for Salvation	35
III. The Presence of Christ the Glory of Christian Assemblies	42
IV. The Holy Spirit received in Hearing the only Source of genuine Profit	48
V. The Duties of Hearers to their Ministers . . .	57
VI. Directions for Hearing the Word	62
VII. The Importance of Reflecting on what we have heard, with a Prayer afterwards	76
VIII. Practical Obedience to the Word	83
IX. Answers to Objections against Practical Obe- dience	89
X. The Danger of Neglecting Divine Truth . . .	95
XI. The blessed Results of Faithful Hearing . . .	103
XII. Address to Different Classes, exhorting them to attend to this Duty	111

RECOMMENDATORY PREFACE.

Having been requested by the Editor of this work to express an opinion of its character and adaptation for usefulness, I have great pleasure in doing so with the hope that it may have some influence in extending the circulation of so salutary and seasonable a lesson in practical piety. Of its excellent Author, scarcely any readers of modern religious books can need to be informed. His very useful treatise on the Lord's Supper, his delightful work on Prayer; his solemn sermons on the Advent of Christ and the Chief Concerns of Man, besides several other equally practical writings, have placed him among the most useful as well as spiritual and devout authors of the present age. His mind is deeply imbued with the spirit of the Gospel. To awaken sinners to the expectation of their latter end, and of all those momentous events of which it is appointed to all to be the witnesses and partakers in the great day of the final coming of the Lord; to put them upon diligent preparation to meet their God; to train their hearts to a devout use of the Holy Scriptures as the appointed means, under the divine blessing, of their sanctification; to lead them to seek by earnest prayer, the influence of the Holy Ghost by whom alone the appointed means of grace can be rendered effectual to the carrying on of the work of grace in their hearts,—and to hold forth the Lord Jesus as the way, the truth and the life; in whom alone the sinner can have acceptance with God, and “who of God is made unto believers, wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption,”—these are the great and precious objects continually in the view of the author. The simple, intelligible style in which he pursues them, adapt his works to the humblest order of mind; while the truly scriptural manner in which he treats his great subjects, cannot but commend his writing to the heart of every lover of “the truth as it is in Jesus.” Of

his works on Prayer, the Lord's Supper, and the Scriptures, he has published an Abridgement by his own pen, similar to that here given of the original work on Hearing the Word. I should rejoice to see an American re-print of each. The present times are specially appropriate for the publication in this country of the work here given to the public. It is the fault of the hearer, much oftener than of the preacher, that *the word does not profit*. But these are times when the remedy is laid exclusively on the preacher. More faith in them that hear working by love, and producing fervent prayer for those who preach, would go far toward supplying the deficiency in the fruitfulness of the word. That hearer and preacher may both lay it to heart, and abide more in Christ, the true vine, that so they may bring forth more fruit "in all goodness and righteousness and truth," and that the volume may be blessed of God to so precious a benefit, is my earnest hope.

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INTRODUCTORY MATTER

BY THE
AMERICAN EDITOR.

It is instructive and refreshing to the devout and docile learner in the school of Christ, to go back to the company of the first disciples. There is a hallowed simplicity and freshness in the scripture narrative of their "fellowship and breaking of bread and prayers." We become as it were disenchanted from the human devices by which our later times have sought to embellish and improve the fair original draught of Christianity. Our hearts begin to beat with freer and warmer pulsations, and we feel ourselves to be nearer the feet of the Master.—The concluding verses of the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles record a delightful and most edifying specimen of the spirit and temper of the Christian converts of Pentecost: "They that gladly received the word were baptized, and the same day there were added to them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the Apostle's, doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul. And all that believed were together, and had all things common. And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people, and the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved." Acts. 2: 41—47. Fragrant and simple record of Christian piety! Who would not desire to possess something of its spirit?—It is well said of these disciples that they *continued stead-*

*

fast in the Apostles doctrine. But for this stroke of the inspired pen, their conversion might have been regarded by some in our day, as exceedingly suspicious. Its suddenness, and the general excitement produced by the preaching of Peter so searchingly and faithfully, and with the demonstration of the spirit and of power,—these circumstances, taken in connexion with that part of the narrative which informs us that they continued *daily* in the temple, and in breaking of bread and in prayers would, we fear, have given occasion to some in our times, to prefer against them the charge of enthusiasm, or of being righteous over-much. What! *daily* in the temple! Engaged daily in public worship!—Surely these first disciples must have greatly over-estimated the privilege of waiting upon God in his house. How could it possibly have been consistent with an exemplary and discreet attention to their secular duties, and a sober and healthy tone of piety, and a circumspect, and wise estimate of the importance and value of worldly pursuits? One would almost think they really acted out the principle of *seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness*. Matt. 6: 33, under the full persuasion that *all other things would be added unto them*. But the piety of these early converts was characterised, not merely by zeal and fervor of spirit as manifested in a high estimate of the privileges of frequent religious worship, but by remarkable steadfastness in the doctrine and fellowship of the Apostles. So that we may dismiss all distrust of the sobriety and soundness of their religion. That it was singularly earnest and fervent, none will doubt.

As Introductory to the present Edition of the useful and popular work of Bickersteth on the *Hearing of the Word*, we propose to draw from the passage above cited from the Acts of the Apostles, several important truths, and so far as we may, in the brief space allowed us, to give ourselves to the discussion and illustration of them.

We deduce from this passage, taken in the breadth and scope of its meaning, the position, THAT FREQUENT RELIGIOUS WORSHIP, IN CONNEXION WITH APOSTOLIC DOCTRINE OR TEACHING, IS EMINENTLY CONGENIAL TO A SPIRITUAL, OR RIGHT STATE OF MIND.

We might safely assume, from the tenor of the narrative, that the state of mind and heart of these converts of Pentecost was a right state, and that their delight in such frequent seasons of worship as they are said to have enjoyed, is referable mainly and specially, to their eminent spirituality.

But our first position will perhaps appear more obvious, and enforce its instruction more directly and impressively upon our hearts as we proceed, by considering several particulars as characteristic of the spirit and conduct of these disciples—each particular going to illustrate the fact that such seasons and acts of worship were in a high degree, congenial to them.

i. *The daily worship of these disciples was WITH ONE ACCORD.**

Fulfil ye my joy saith St. Paul to the Philippians, 2: 2, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of *one accord*,† of one mind. Such was in truth the delightful state of these our primitive disciples of Pentecost,—a

* Phil. 2: 2. It is worthy of notice that the expressive word *ὁμοθυμαδὸν* ... with one accord, is confined almost exclusively in the New Testament, to St. Luke's narrative of primitive piety in the first chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, and a few subsequent passages of the same book. The diligent reader will observe that it is applied to the *Twelve Apostles*; to the *one hundred and seventy disciples*, and to the *whole company of believers*: chap. 1: 14;—2: 1;—2: 46.—“It doth singularly set out” says Lightfoot, the sweet union that the gospel had made” among the first disciples of Christ. “It hath a singular weight and significancy and showeth a peculiar fruit of Christ's sending the Holy Ghost upon them.” Vid. Lightfoot. Com. Acts. Chap. ii. § 4,

† Phil. 2: 2. The word here used by St. Paul differs from that before noticed as the favorite of St. Luke in the Acts, in describing the *oneness of heart* of the early disciples. That of St. Paul, here employed . . . *σὺμφωνοί*: . . . and rendered of *one accord*, is also very forcible and expressive.

sweet and spiritual unanimity, a oneness of feeling, and sympathy, and interest, binding them together as by a holy charity—the bond of perfectness. They had one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of them all, † and why should they not be, of *one accord*,—of one spirit, even as they were called in one hope of their calling. || Thus keeping the unity of the spirit, they were *indeed united* in the bond of peace. § They had all drunk into the same spirit, and why should they not all be of the same mind and heart? Such were they. *And they are our ensamples.*

ii. Observe their *fellowship*.

This was intimately connected with the characteristic just noticed. For where there is no *accord*, there can be no *spiritual fellowship*.—Does not the lamentable absence of this accord, this sweet, we may say, gracious sympathy of mind and heart, from many of the assemblies of worshippers of our times, account in some measure for the so prevalent absence of that spirit of christian fellowship which is an essential and cardinal element of christian character, and so necessary to efficiency and success in all the good works of faith and love in the Church of Christ? If we walk in the light, saith St. John, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another.* One of the special subjects of grateful praise to God, mentioned by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Philipian Church, was their fellowship in the Gospel, which had continued uninterrupted from the time of their conversion to the date of his writing to them.

† Ephes. 4: 5, 6.

|| Ephes. 4: 3, 4.

§ The unity of the Church as one mystical body united under one head, the Lord Christ, was greatly insisted upon by the early christians. As essential to this they required *unity of faith* in the doctrines of the gospel, *unity of holy obedience* to the institutions and commandments of Christ,—and *unity of brotherly love and charity* among all the members of the Household of faith. August. Contr. Crescon. Lib. 1.—Idem. de Unit. Eccles. Cap. 21.

* 1 John 1: 7.

I thank my God, saith he, upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all, making request with joy, for your *fellowship in the Gospel* from the first day until now.† The disciples of Pentecost continued steadfast not only in the Apostle's doctrine, but in fellowship with them and with each other, thus exemplifying in a most instructive manner the preciousness of this grace. This it was which in a great measure contributed to render the frequent seasons of worship which they enjoyed so congenial to them.

iii. We may observe also, that their sweet accord or union of heart, and their fellowship of spirit in the gospel, was accompanied with *frequent communion in the Lord's Supper*.

They continued with one accord in fellowship *and in breaking of bread*. Several of the early versions of the New Testament, as the Syriac for example, render this expression, *breaking of bread,—participating in the Eucharist*, or the Lord's Supper. But apart from this passage, we know that it was the custom of the early converts and so continued during the three first centuries, to celebrate that holy ordinance at least as often as every Sunday. So that one of the designations of the Lord's day came to be the day of bread,—*dies panis*—referring to the breaking of bread in the Eucharist, or Communion of the body and blood of Christ. Besides the Lord's day, it appears from the concurrent testimony of the early christian writers,‡ that it was a very general custom to receive the Eucharist on *Wednesdays and Fridays*,—in many churches also, on *Saturdays*. The Christian Father Augustine says "the sacrament of his [Christ's] body is in some places prepared and taken every day, in other places, only on certain days

† Phil. 1: 3, 4, 5.

‡ Clem. Alex. Strom. 1. p. 318.—Chrys. Tom. V. de Resur.—Justin. Apol. ii. p. 97.—Ignat. Ep. ad Ephes; n. 13.

with an interval of time between them.”|| In one of his Epistles he says those who received the communion the least frequently, did it at least each Lord’s day.”§ Cyprian records it as the usage of the Church of Carthage to communicate every day.¶

Now this matter of historical fact,—and as such chiefly is it here introduced,—going to show *incidentally, the frequency of religious worship*, in the early times of the christian Church, and *directly*, the frequency of these seasons of communion,—is worthy the attention of Christians of our times, especially as illustrating the prominence assigned to the Lord’s Supper by the early disciples of Christ as an ordained means of edification and grace, as well as indicating the eminently spiritual tone of piety, the right state of mind and heart of those who so much delighted in these holy duties. Had not the first christian disciples been eminently spiritual, singularly united in heart and fellowship, such daily seasons of worship and communion would, by no means, have been congenial to them. They would have found, as Christians of our times so often do, occasions of frequent *absence from*, instead of *attendance on*, the worship of Almighty God, upon the ground merely of worldly cares,—or even of neglect of the Lord’s Supper from a cold and indifferent state of heart, or from not being in perfect charity with all men; or from other causes indicating defective views, or defective and erroneous practice, or both.**

||. August. Tract. 26. in Joh. p. 94.

§. August. Ep. 118. ad Januar. Cap. ii.

¶. Cyprian. de orat. Dom. p. 147.—Ep. 36. al. 38. ad Thebaritanos. p. 125. Ep. 54.

** We have known instances of apparently conscientious persons, so erroneously interpreting duty in regard to a devout preparation for, and due celebration of, the Lord’s Supper, even at the infrequent seasons of its recurrence in most modern Churches, as to allow the claims of ordinary works of charity, on the Lord’s day, to take a decided precedence in their views both of that “most comfortable sacrament of the body and blood of Christ,” and of the divine ordinance of Preach-

Had not these primitive disciples been remarkable for spirituality of mind, and for fellowship with the Apostles and with one another *as members of the body of Christ, the Church* which he purchased with his own blood,—in place of their continuing steadfast in the apostle's doctrine—that is, not merely in adherence to the doctrine received at their conversion, but in steady and regular attendance upon the preaching or teaching of the Apostles as the com-

ing and Prayers. Thus, perhaps unconsciously, elevating human devils, in themselves good because *in their place*, in accordance with God's word, above CHRIST'S INSTITUTIONS.—The argument is exceedingly specious, and the practical error, most dangerous: Eg. gr. Being, I will suppose, a lay member of a Church of Christ and perhaps immature in religious experience, and greatly needing myself the sincere milk of the word that I may grow thereby and become rooted and grounded in the faith, I am called upon to engage in a work of mercy and charity during a part of the Lord's day appropriated by the Church to a regular season of worship and of hearing the word. After reflection and prayer with reference to the good work in question, and the giving up of my privilege and duty of worship and of Christian fellowship and prayers, on one part of the Sabbath, I consent tremblingly and circumspectly, and perhaps with increased attention to closet duties for a time, to engage in the work. Suppose it to be the assembling together of several poor and destitute families including adults and children, remote from the ordinances and means of grace, and not very likely, in any other way, to receive adequate christian instruction. My sympathies very soon became enlisted for them. They are much in my thoughts. I become a sort of lay missionary to them—a teacher of babes, for such they are in understanding and knowledge. I begin to see the fruits of my labours, if not in their conversion, at least in their improvement in various ways. They reward my toil, which is spoken of as very self-denying, with gratitude. They look up to me, not only as a friend but as a benefactor and more than all, as a *Teacher*.—I begin to look with satisfaction, perhaps complacency, upon my relation to them as an almoner of spiritual blessings, and really to feel, that it is both more agreeable and blessed, to give than to receive—instruction. I must necessarily however, occupy a good deal of my leisure time during the evenings of the week to prepare instruction for my little charge.—And in order to do this, I must forego, in addition to one or two of the Sunday services, the regular and in a sense hallowed seasons of Christian worship with my pastor and my fellow-disciples in the Church of which I am a member. Thus I gradually become estranged from the spirit of fellowship with those who were in Christ before me, and instead of being of one accord and of one mind with them, thinking the same thing, and striving *together with them* for the promotion of the faith of the Gospel, my efforts are almost wholly apart from them.—And I have at length discovered an important secret, viz: that though

missioned and accredited ministers of Christ,—we should have seen them broken up into numberless little private societies; thus before they were perhaps aware, reflecting dishonor upon the institutions of God and so multiplying occasions of meeting together—(occasions which, having a religious tendency, may seem to be altogether unobjectionable), as that they would be almost of necessity, obliged to forsake the assembling of themselves together

Pastoral Instruction and watchfulness and a steadfast continuance in ministerial or apostolic teaching, and in fellowship and breaking of bread, and in prayers, might have been very well for the disciples of Pentecost, and very wholesome and necessary for many in every age of the Church, I can do very well without them. My divine Master said it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath-day, and multitudes are perishing for lack of knowledge, and may rise up in the Judgment and condemn me if I do not, even at the sacrifice of the ordinances of God's house, go on the sabbath to teach them *all the words of this life*. My duty therefore, on the whole, becomes clear. My mind is fully and upon mature views of relative obligation, made up!

—Now this process of sophistry, is in substance, not unfrequently used, in our large cities especially. We have known instances of young Christians, thus circumstanced with reference to the obscurer wards and lanes of our large towns, or their environs, really thinking they were doing God service, and putting to shame their more quiet, unenterprising, and humble fellow-disciples by such a course. Would that we could say, we have never known any such, who have thus fallen into the master-snare of the devil—*spiritual arrogance and pride*, and who in ceasing to be *learners* in Christ's school, ceased also in effect, to be *his disciples*.

In the retired scenes of the country, the danger is perhaps less, but still great, especially to young christians. The principle remains the same. The truth in regard to this important practical matter, as is usual in such questions, lies we apprehend midway between the extremes. The first and chief duty of a true disciple of *Him who went about doing good*, is to cultivate in his own heart the *living and cardinal graces of humility and meekness*. These will beget docility of heart and mind which will enable him continually, to add to his 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.* But as on the one hand the process of spiritual and evangelical growth will not be healthful if our disciple altogether *forget to do good and to communicate*, so on the other, will all *appearance of growth*, be deceptive if, neglecting to cultivate genuine christian meekness, and falling into a defective and very partial use, and an erroneous estimate, of Christ's Institutions, he is chiefly or wholly employed in *active duty*.

* 2 Pet. 1; 5, 6, 7.

in the house of God, as the manner of many in our day is.†

It is a circumstance no less edifying than attractive and beautiful, that the disciples of Pentecost appear to have placed great honor upon the blessed Sacrament of our Lord, as well as his other institutions. We know of no circumstance embodied in the narrative of their sweet and heavenly piety, which goes more directly to show its elevated and spiritual tone than their frequent 'breaking of bread.' Surely the precious seasons of worship enjoyed in connexion with that holy Communion, must have been most congenial to them

† The writer begs on this subject not to be misunderstood. His main aim in the above remarks, is to exalt the Divine Institutions of the Gospel only to the relative position in which Christ left them, and in which they appear to have been held in the purest times of the Church; not to discredit such ways of christian well-doing as are in their principles and spirit, in harmony with those Institutions. He frankly and honestly avows that he does not regard the ingenious and fractional subdivisions and minor associations of her members as *the chief honor*, though historically considered, it be a *chief distinction*, of the present age of the Christian Church. He is however, equally ready to say, that he has nowhere yet seen a conclusive argument *against* the voluntary principle. The *abuse of a principle* does not demonstrate that it is *founded in error*. The voluntary principle, *rightly considered*, is, as he believes, inherent in the original constitution of the Church itself, and in all essential matters of religion,—only it has *meets and bounds*. The main error which the writer has made the subject of passing inadvertence in the above remarks, is, that these meets and bounds are so often and so inconsiderately disregarded.—The voluntary principle as embodied in such an institution as that of the American Bible Society, for example, and others that might be specified, is in the view of the present writer, and he is free to express the opinion, in accordance with the Institutions of Christ. That there may be sometimes a little friction in the working of the human machinery, does not prove that the principle is in itself, a human device, or that it is, in the main erroneous—far less anti-scripturally applied. The *adaptation* of the principle is of course *human*, and all that is human is more or less defective. But the principle rightly understood, is at the very foundation of the Church of Christ, and of all efforts to spread the gospel and its divine Institutions with it. Our responsibility is in the application of it wisely and piously, with sobriety of judgement, as well as fervor of zeal,—and in such ways and in connexion with such agencies, as are either plainly set forth by Christ and his Apostles, or manifestly not in opposition to principles which are fundamental in the constitution of the Christian Church.

iii. Another characteristic of the christian temper and spirit of these disciples, indicating a state of mind specially favorable to the enjoyment of frequent seasons of religious worship is, *The manner in which they held their worldly property, and the liberality with which they distributed it to the relief of their poor and necessitous brethren, and for the advancement of the cause of Christ.*

None of them said that aught that he possessed was his own.—Covetousness is idolatry.† These godly worshippers possessed and exemplified a spirit of entirely the opposite character. They had given *themselves to Christ*, and therefore, neither counted *themselves nor aught that they possessed, their own*. We have not indeed in this passage of the evangelical history, any such evidence of a *community of goods* among the first disciples as some have been ready to suppose. The nearest approach to a perfect community of goods was in the family of Christ and his Apostles—of which Judas was the treasurer. The twelve Apostles appear to have regarded themselves as of one household, and having forsaken all to follow him who had not where to lay his head, the small means necessary to supply their ordinary daily wants, might well be kept in one bag, or scrip. Yet even in this instance of apparent perfect community of goods, there was certainly one exception. When the expiring Saviour on the cross, commended Mary|| to the beloved disciple, St. John, it is added—“from that hour that disciple took her to his *own home*,” of which, as would seem, he must have retained possession during the previous period of his discipleship, and while a member of the family of our Lord.—It is also evident, that no obligation had been imposed upon the converts of Pentecost, to give up the *legal tenure* of their property and throw it wholly

† Collos. 3: 5.

||John 19: 27.

into a common stock.—“While it remained was it not *thine own?*” said St. Peter to Ananias, “and when it was sold was it not *in thine own power?*” † His sin against the Holy Ghost consisted in this, viz: that having *voluntarily* professed to consecrate it wholly to the Church for the relief of the poor and the advancement of the Gospel, he *secretly and dishonestly kept back part of the price.* ¶ The Apostle clearly admits that Ananias had a right to retain the legal title to his estate if he had chosen so to do; but that having *of his own accord*, though as the sequel proved, not sincerely, declared that he had given up that title and consecrated his property without any-reserve, to Christ and his Church, an awful example of divine displeasure toward such insincerity and guilt, was made both of himself and of her who had agreed with him to tempt the Holy Ghost.

But while, as we have said, there is no evidence in the passages from the Acts under consideration, considered in their relation to others from the same inspired pen, that a *literal community of goods was enjoined* and felt to be obligatory upon the disciples,—much less that any such principle was established as of perpetual obligation in the Church of Christ,—still there is most instructive evidence that such was the *unworldly spirit* of these primitive converts, that none of them regarded his worldly property as his own in any self-appropriating, or selfish sense. They were stewards of God, and so they regarded themselves. So entirely and unreservedly had they given themselves to Christ and his Church, and with themselves all they possessed, that they

‡. Acts 5. 4.

¶ Is it not greatly to be feared that many who have voluntarily consecrated themselves to the Lord's service under the solemn and awful sanctions of the sacraments of grace, *renouncing the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of the world and all covetous desires of the same*, keep back part of the price? This is done when we withhold our affections—our cheerful service—our worldly property from Christ,—when in any sense, we live as if *we were our own*.

appear to have felt and acted upon the noble christian principle, *that they were not their own*,—and hence it was, that from gratitude to him who had given himself for them, as well as from a high and solemn sense of duty, they regarded nothing appertaining to them as their own in any worldly or selfish sense. Such appears to have been their view of the responsibilities and privileges of their stewardship of worldly property, that *in spirit* they may be truly said to *have been together** and to *have had all things common*. Several instances of self-denial and christian liberality on the noblest scale are recorded, and worthy are they to be had in perpetual remembrance in the Church. Illustrious examples are they of the unselfish and unworldly spirit of those who drank of the waters of life so near its pure fountain. How do these examples rebuke the narrow and selfish spirit of many who are called christians, in this world-loving and bustling age. They exhibit also the most delightful and salutary instruction, and will in all coming ages continue to enforce this instruction upon the hearts of

* Acts 2: 44. *And they that believed were together . . . ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ . . .* This phrase is ordinarily used when speaking of persons meeting or, being together in the same place, Matt. 22: 34., Luke 17; 35., Acts 1; 15.—The meaning is however, modified by the connexion in which it stands—the context and scope of the passage. Sometimes it signifies *identity of time, unanimity*, etc. Here, the obvious meaning of this phrase in its connexion is, that *great unanimity prevailed among the disciples*,—and such was their *unselfish spirit* and so freely did they distribute of their worldly substance, that they may be said to have had all things common, for not only was there a readiness to distribute of their *goods* [ὀψάρθεις . . . *personal or moveable property*;] but they even, (i. e. some of them as appears from the narrative) sold their *possessions*, .. [κτῆματα, *fixed property, houses, vineyards*,] and parted them to all as *every man had need*. The last expression evidently modifies and limits the foregoing passage. *As the exigencies of the case*, the circumstances of the poor disciples required, they cheerfully imparted to them, even to the selling of *such*, so much of their *possessions* as it became necessary they should dispose of in order to meet the said exigencies of the infant Church. We are not hence to understand that each or every one that was thus possessed of lands, etc. sold *all*, but that they in such wise and so far regarded *all as common*, if needful to supply the wants of their suffering brethren, that they readily and cheerfully laid it at the Apostle's feet for distribution.

those who,—keeping back no part of the price—dedicate themselves unreservedly to the Lord.—In the record of St. Luke however, the instances mentioned of selling all and casting it into the Lord's treasury, constitute the *exception* and not the *rule*. Yet such exceptions were they, as honoured Christ, and as were called for by the peculiar state of the infant Church,—and be it remembered, *may be called for at any period of her history*. Joses the Cyprian, surnamed by the Apostles, Barnabas, the son of Consolation, is honorably mentioned as one of those illustrious examples of Christian liberality.† *Having land, [probably in his native island, Cyprus,]—he sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the Apostles' feet.*‡ Not only did this disciple thus voluntarily cast into the treasury of the Lord all the living that he had, but he forsook all in a yet more perfect and self-sacrificing sense, and became an eminently zealous and successful preacher of Christ among the heathen, ever counting it a grateful privilege, in the midst of privation and suffering and want, to be enabled to say with the holy Paul: *having nothing and yet possessing all things.*||

But while as we have said, this and such-like cases, appear to have constituted the exception and not the rule, as to the entire and literal surrender of the legal tenure of worldly property for the exigencies of the then infant Church, and moreover to have been voluntary; still it is to be especially observed that the spirit of the members, of this blessed family and household of faith, with which we would make our readers more familiarly acquainted, was such, that they held their worldly estates and property of

† Barnabas was at the time of his conversion, a Levite, and became a christian preacher and *Missionary*. Acts 13; 2—14. He may be supposed therefore to have had one motive for this act of liberality beyond those which influenced the majority of this company of believers, viz: that connected with the principle laid down by our Saviour, Matt. 10: 9, 10., as especially applicable to those times, and to that noble and self-denying service.

‡ Acts 4: 36, 37.

|| 2 Cor. 6: 10.

every kind *exactly by the same tenure by which they held themselves.* This was upon a principle identical with that of St. Paul's teaching: ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price,§ and therefore did they glorify God with their body and spirit not only, but with their worldly goods, all of which were alike His. So that, whether with Barnabas, they voluntarily and literally gave up all, or whether they retained in their hands the legal title of their 'possessions,' it is certain they held all in sacred trust under the responsibilities of Christian Stewardship. *This principle is essentially christian, and no disciple of Jesus in any age of the Church is exempt from its obligations.*

No wonder christian reader, that with a spirit so kindred to that of their divine Lord, who being rich for their sakes became poor that they through his poverty might be rich, —who gave himself for them that they might be a peculiar people, zealous of good works; no wonder that with such largeness of heart these disciples should have *greatly delighted daily* in the Apostle's teaching and fellowship, and breaking of bread and *prayers.* No wonder such precious seasons of worship were congenial to them.

iv. *Prayers:* This affords another illustration of the temper of mind and tone of christian spirit of this delightful household of primitive faith and practice, showing us that such daily seasons of worship in the Temple must have been in a high degree, congenial to the disciples.—Observe, not only were they steadfast in attendance upon the Apostle's teaching, not only were they remarkable for their cordial christian fellowship, for often participating the holy Eucharist, and for great liberality in dispensing their substance for Christ's sake; they were equally steadfast in *Prayers.* Times have been, nay still are in the Christian Church, when public Prayers were and are little esteemed

§ 1 Cor. 6: 19, 20., 7: 23.

by those who frequent the house of God. "Itching ears" often occupy the place of hearts attuned to the *worship* of the most High. But what is so remarkable and instructive in the example of these early disciples of our Lord, is the due order and harmonious and symmetrical *body* of their christian character.

We do not find in their example any evidence that *preaching*, though an ordinance of Christ, was elevated unduly, and at the expense of *prayers*—worship, equally a divine ordinance. We do not observe that *breaking of bread*, though exceedingly honored as an institution of Christ and very frequently participated in, was substituted for *Christian fellowship* or Christian union. Nor do we perceive that one, or all of these, were allowed to take the place of *Christian liberality*,—distribution to the necessity of saints and to the promotion of the cause of Christ. No instance appears to be recorded of any eminently pious and zealous disciple among them remarkable for steadfastness in Apostolic doctrine, and yet utterly negligent of apostolic order. No one is spoken of as singularly zealous for mere external order and due celebration of Prayers and other Christian Ordinances, and yet radically defective in the spirit of Christian fellowship and love to his fellow disciples and zeal for the adding to the Church daily such as should be saved. Nor do we hear of any,—except indeed Ananias and Saphira,*—whose boundless charity and benevolence was expected to apologize for the want of honesty of heart and tongue, and for sincere love to Christ. No record is here made of any one of the disciples at this bright and blessed era of their history, who deemed it consistent to fill his heart and head wholly with the duties of a secular calling during six days of the week,—on the Lord's day only, going to his seat in Church, and when there, list-

* Acts 5: 1—11.

lessly uniting in the prayers as if *worship* were a penance, —habitually inattentive to the Scripture “read every Sabbath day,”—and hearing the doctrine of God’s WORD as if it were merely an exercise for flippant criticism or to afford matter like a secular harrangue, for the conversation of such as, “being already learned,” have no need “to take heed how they hear” THE MESSAGE OF GOD unto them. There appears to be no single exception made, so far as we can observe, in favor of any one at this period, falling into the habit of withdrawing himself wholly from all the precious and frequent seasons of worship of his fellow-disciples.

We have before us in the whole narrative, an example of beautiful order, of spiritual and well-tempered zeal, of enlarged yet consistent benevolence, with the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace and love, and steadfastness in the Apostles’ teaching and fellowship, and breaking of bread and prayers—all striving together for the faith of the Gospel. We have here what is so rarely seen in these later times, a Christian body without scism, acting upon the fundamental but ever unsavory principle, that ‘order is heaven’s first law,’ and that effectually and steadily to preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, there must be the cement of a divine and spiritual fellowship, and a faithful working together, each in his vocation and ministry, and all in accordance with the institutions of Christ.

CHAP. I.

THE GENERAL IMPORTANCE OF HEARING THE WORD.

When the ground in summer has become parched and barren from a long drought, how delightfully refreshing are the grateful showers that descend from heaven, and clear the atmosphere, and cool the air, and water the earth! A freshness appears in the verdure, the plants revive, the flowers burst forth, new fragrance perfumes the garden, and all wears the aspect of reviving, and returning health, and animation.

Such is the effect of a faithful preaching and hearing of the word of God. Like the earth, which silently receives the rain, and exhibits the blessing in its varied and lovely and beneficial produce; so the practical hearer insensibly receives a benefit, which his life manifests, and which blesses all with whom he has intercourse. *My doctrine, says Moses, shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew; as the small rain upon the tender herb, as the showers that water the earth.*

A free and gratuitous gift, directly from our heavenly Father, is the rain that fertilizes the land on which it falls; and similar is the greater blessing which we have now to consider, to which man is mainly indebted for his spiritual fertility and fruitfulness.

Great is the importance, as well as the blessing, of hearing the word; consider, first, THE DIVINE AUTHORITY WITH WHICH IT IS DELIVERED TO US. When the ministers of God speak according to the will of God, and by virtue of their office, it is to be regarded as if God himself addressed us. The foundation of their office is a divine commission;—Go

ye, and teach all nations . . . to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Matt. xxviii. 19, 20. Our Lord told the seventy disciples whom he sent out as teachers,—*He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me.* Luke x. 16. The Gospel is a divine message from God to man.

It is true, then, Christian reader, that God speaks to men by his ministers. He requires you to hear them, for they are *the messengers of the Lord of hosts*, and the people should *seek the law at their mouth.* Mal. ii. 7. Consider the majesty and greatness of Him who sends the message—thy Creator, thy Preserver, thy Judge. If a servant disregard a master's word, if a subject refuse to hear his king, if a child turn away from a father speaking,—the insult and injury are obvious; but to refuse to hear the Lord of all lords, the King of all kings, the universal Father,—surely includes each particular offence with special and peculiar aggravations.

Do you try to shake off the conviction of the divine authority of the preached word, by talking of the weakness of the instrument? Remember, that an important message is not the less important because the *person* of the messenger may have little to command respect. Do you say that he may commit mistakes, or even fall into some errors? but remember, again, that there is an infallible touchstone of the truth. Acts. xvii. 11.

THE IMMENSELY WEIGHTY INTERESTS WHICH THE WORD BRINGS BEFORE US show farther the importance of hearing. Moses told Israel, *Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day . . . for it is not a vain thing for you, because it is your life.* Deut. xxxii. 46, 47. It is to regulate every day of our lives; it is to direct every thought of our hearts, every word of our lips, and every part of our conduct: destitute of its influence, we are blind, igno-

rant, and wretched; living and labouring without adequate ends, and not only not furthering, but constantly weakening and destroying our true interests and happiness: under its influence, we are wise to salvation, filled with solid peace and in the pathway to eternal life and blessedness.

HEARING THE WORD IS THE APPOINTED MEANS OF RECEIVING SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS. If you want spiritual life, *hear, and your soul shall live* (Isa. lv. 3); *the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God and they that hear shall live.* John v. 25. If you want nourishment in the spiritual life, *desire the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.* 1 Pet. ii. 2. If you want comfort, the office of the ministry is *to comfort all that mourn.* Isa. lxi. 2. If you want sanctification, *Sanctify them, prays our Redeemer, through thy truth; thy word is truth.* By what was the church of God first commenced? by hearing. Acts ii 41: By what is it that men are saved? through hearing (1 Cor. i. 21; Rom. x. 8.) The power is of God; he gives the increase; but hearing is the means to be used by us. In short, if you want a cheering evidence that you belong to Christ, it is a grand and distinguishing character of those who shall hereafter dwell with him,—*My sheep hear my voice.* Our Lord solemnly asserts *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation.* John v. 24. How incalculably important is that with which God has connected such blessings!

THE SPECIAL ADVANTAGES WHICH WE ENJOY, show us our peculiar obligations to hear. The Israelites had many special advantages for becoming wise unto salvation. *He showed his word unto Jacob, his statutes and judgments unto Israel.* Ps. cxlvii. But we Christians have superior advantages which bring a higher responsibility; our neglect of them is more dangerous; by our improvement of them we may derive a larger benefit. The whole of the sacred

Scripture is now in our possession, and exalted as the publicly acknowledged Code of faith and duty. 'The Apostle's statement,—*God who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the Fathers by the Prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son*, belongs to us. We may every day *hear in our own tongue the wonderful works of God*. O that we were duly sensible of the immense blessing of having the word of Christ so richly and so abundantly as we have!

THE FREEDOM WITH WHICH WE MAY NOW OBTAIN SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS further shows the importance of hearing. A day is coming when, if we now refuse to hear God's words, no possible effort or sacrifice can obtain for us the least spiritual blessing or comfort. Luke xvi. 24—31. But now every blessing bestowed through faithful hearing may be READILY obtained. The blessings of salvation are FREELY given. Not only is the invitation from God to sinners to return, free and spontaneous, but the blessings are granted *without money, and without price*. It would not meet our necessities that the poor and needy were invited, had they to purchase the blessings which they require with some equivalent.—They are therefore bestowed freely. St. Paul describes our being justified, to be *freely and by his grace*; and he asserts our being saved, to be *by grace, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works*. Isaiah invites all,—*Come ye, buy, and eat, without money, and without price*; without any compensation from man, or any deserving on his part. By a free salvation, the proud are humbled, and the depressed lifted up; *boasting is excluded*, and all glory given to God. But, if this be the case, O how important to avail ourselves of such rich blessings! how important to listen, to hear, to repent, to believe, and be saved.

This will be seen in one farther consideration, THE EARNESTNESS WITH WHICH GOD HIMSELF PASSES US TO RECEIVE HIS

WORD. Some of the most affecting addresses in the Bible are on this point. *O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments!* Isa. xlviii. 18. *O that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways!* Ps. lxxxi. 13. *O that they were wise, that they understood this!* Deut. xxxii. 29. How earnest is God in his gracious invitations, as if to set before us, in the most lively way, the immense importance of eternal things! *Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price.* Isa. lv. 1. *As though God did beseech you by us, we pray you, in Christ's stead.* 2 Cor. v. 20. God would not so address his sinful creatures, were not the subject a matter of infinite moment to them. There is a reality, a value, and a magnitude, in the concerns of the immortal soul, far beyond our highest thoughts; and surely, that we should, by our own negligence, wilfully perish, when salvation is thus freely and earnestly set before us, is grievous and lamentable beyond conception!

Once more;—THE WORD WHICH WE NOW HEAR WILL JUDGE US IN THE GREAT DAY. The preached Gospel will follow us into another world, and will there appear either against us to condemn us, if we have disregarded it, or for us to justify us, if we have received it. *He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him; the words that I have spoken, the same shall judge him at the last day.* John xii. 4. 8. Men now throw every contempt upon it. The Gospel is preached in their very towns and streets, and multitudes never hear it at all, and multitudes disregard all they hear. O, how will such be astonished and confounded to find that word, which they reckoned little better than folly, or altogether despised as foolishness, exalted as the rule of final judgment, and that which decides their never-ending condition!

The importance of hearing may be put into another light by considering the weakness of those objections which are sometimes brought against this duty.

Thus it is often said, I CAN READ AND LEARN AT HOME.—What! will you pretend to be wiser than God? God has commanded you to hear his ministers. You cannot at home obey the injunction to hear his truth, and that of—*forsake not the assembling of yourselves together*. O venture not vainly to reason against the wisdom and authority of the great Legislator, or to set aside his authorised mode of doing you good, by equivalents and expedients, subversive in this case of the obedience which you owe to Him! Christians will not, and cannot, when they act in character, attend to only one part of their duty, and that at the time when they should be fulfilling another. It will be sufficient for them to know that God ever manifests his special blessing with the assemblies of his people. Exod. xxv. 22; 2 Chron. vii. 12—16; Matt. xviii. 20. O lose not all the interest in the blessing promised, by perversely choosing to walk in your own way!

But you farther object, THERE IS NOTHING NEW IN WHAT I HEAR. I know it already; it is the same thing over and over again. But do you not make a mistake, if you expect that the minister should be always delivering something new? The ministerial office consists much in reminding (Rom. xv. 14, 15,) and stirring up, and establishing those that are informed. 1 John ii. 7. In the words of St. Peter, it is *to put you always in remembrance of these things, though you do know them* (2 Pet. i. 12;) or, as St. Paul says, *to write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe*. Phil. iii. 1. Hearing the word is God's plan for nourishing the soul, just as eating food is his plan for nourishing the body; and as you need the same kind of food day after day for your body, so you need this same kind of instruction repeatedly for your soul.

But it is still farther objected, **THE MINISTER THAT I CAN HEAR IS OF SMALL ABILITY.** If we allow the truth of your objection, it is no sufficient answer to the duty brought before you. What, if it should be true of your minister, as it has been of many others,—*God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty, and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things which are!* 1 Cor. i. 27, 28. Nay, still more, are you in earnest for your eternal interest? What, if *it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe* (1 Cor. i 21,) and you should be among the happy number! Herbert justly says,—

The worst speak something good: if all want sense,
 God takes a text, and preacheth patience.
 He that gets patience, and the blessing which
 Preachers conclude with, hath not lost his pains.

There are other inferior objections, which still sometimes keep men from hearing the word. Thus there are some in superior stations, heads of families, and persons of rank or learning, who seem to **THINK THEMSELVES ABOVE HEARING.** It will do very well for the common people and for their children and servants; but as for them, they need it not. O strange infatuation! Are they above God who commands them to hear? Have they not also a *Master in heaven?* They expect obedience from their inferiors, while they themselves disobey, a plain direction of their great Superior. They would directly dismiss a servant who disobeyed repeated injunctions, and yet deceive themselves by thinking that they may with impunity despise the divine will. How, if it should be found that their fancied wisdom is a folly above the most extravagant and absurd weakness of those they most despise! *The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.* Nor is the case better with those who plead their **BUSINESS AS AN EXCUSE FOR NOT HEARING.** What

is it, but a plain confession of their blindness and depravity? They acknowledge that they are so blind, that they do not see their eternal interests to be the great concern and business of life; that they are so depraved, that they are not ashamed to avow their very blindness as an excuse for their sin. Nor can we allow either of another excuse, —I CANNOT RECOLLECT WHAT I HEAR. We recollect what we are interested in, and attend to. A servant will bear in his mind a message from his master; all will remember a temporal benefit promised them. The great reason of forgetfulness is, we want a real concern about our salvation! Others say, WE HAVE NOT SUITABLE CLOTHING! Why should that more prevent your going to hear, than it does going to visit your friends, or to get your food, or to receive directions from your earthly employers? Consider if the real meaning of this be not, My pride will be offended by contrast with others, and I do not think my soul worth the humbling of my pride. Others think UNFAVOURABLE WEATHER QUITE A SUFFICIENT REASON FOR ABSENCE. There are those who judge otherwise. There was a pious lady, who was blind, and yet, after she became pious, to the end of her life (for thirty-five years) constantly, twice every Sunday, in rain, hail, or snow, as well as on fine days, she went through all weathers to hear her stated minister. Her soul eminently prospered. Thus, like Anna, who for *fourscore and four years served God with fastings and prayers night and day*, she left an example condemning those who, for slight reasons, stay at home.

There are some things which KEEP THE POOR FROM REGULAR ATTENDING. In various parts of the country, many will attend in the afternoon, who do not come in the morning. They indulge themselves with more rest; the wife wants to prepare a hot dinner for the family—to get the children dressed out; and sometimes poor people are such bad managers, that they have even to wash their clothes

on Sunday morning. Christian females, in visiting the poor, might do much good in pointing out the evil of these different habits, and the way to remedy them by a little care and forethought, and the blessing which the fear and service of God would bring to the whole family. There are other cases where little children prevent parents attending; but much could be done by a little management among the poor themselves. How do they contrive when they leave home for worldly things—for the market, for pleasure? Their contrivances for worldly purposes will generally answer all their objections. A careful and pious wife will soon learn how to provide on the Saturday all that is needful to make her husband and family comfortable, without interfering with the duties of the Sunday.

Is not the hidden and secret cause of all these difficulties really this?—I do not like to be restrained from my own way, nor to be reprov'd for sin; I prefer present recreation and self-indulgence. And what is this, but rebellion against the Most High? and where will this end, but in certain and irretrievable ruin? Break manfully, and at once, through all these obstructions. Delay no more. Hear the voice of God, and you shall enjoy privileges and blessings, of which you have at present no conception, and which you would not part with for all the world.

CHAP. II.

PREACHING THE WORD THE SPECIAL ORDINANCE OF GOD FOR THE SALVATION OF HIS PEOPLE, AND THE MANIFESTATION OF THOSE WHO ARE LOST.

The most important aspect in which we can regard the ministry of the word is, that it is the grand appointed means for the salvation of man. *It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.* 1 Cor. i. 21.

When our Lord gave the commission to *preach the Gospel to every creature*, he added this all-important sanction,—*He that believeth, and is baptised, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned,* Mark xvi. 16.

The words evidently imply that preaching is God's special ordinance for salvation. The Apostles show this at length in various parts of the Epistles; see Rom. x.; 1 Cor. i. 3. Hearing is, then, God's appointment; it is his special ordinance for communicating faith, and all its blessed results. Its effect depends not on the perfection or imperfection, the meanness or dignity, the degree or gift of grace in the minister. Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas (men doubtless of very different talents and graces,) or the very weakest of the Apostles, preached, they were, after all, but ministers, "by whom," or by whose instrumentality, "men believed;" their efficiency was in the appointment, their success was in the ordinance, as instituted and ordained by God for the special purpose of conveying grace to the hearer. Preaching, as a constituted means of grace, can alone prosper: the benefit depends not on the minister, but on God's blessing on the means, and

on that faith in the hearer which applies the word in power; for the word preached did not profit, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. One reason, probably that the sermons of the most accomplished ministers produce so little comparative effect is, because men expect more from the minister, than from the power of God's Spirit blessing the ordinance as a means of grace to their souls.

It is not, however, every sort of preaching, but preaching the Gospel, *the Gospel of peace—glad tidings of Good things* (Rom. x. 15.)—*Christ crucified—Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption* (1 Cor. i. 23, 30,) that is the means appointed for conveying to man the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the graces and blessings of the Christian dispensation.

It is evident from various passages of Holy Scripture, that the great subject of the ministry of the Apostles was Christ crucified for our sins. They speak of this as the prominent subject and characteristic feature of their ministry. *I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.* 1 Cor. ii. 2. *I delivered unto you, FIRST OF ALL, that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins.* 1 Cor. xv. 3. *They CEASED NOT to teach and preach Jesus Christ.* Acts, v. 42. *Paul, AS HIS MANNER WAS went in unto them, and three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered and risen again from the dead.* Acts xvii. 2, 3. He counted it his great office as well as honour *to preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.* Eph. iii. 8.

No preaching, then, is apostolic, in which Christ Jesus, his cross and his resurrection, his grace and his glory, are not prominent. The doctrines which the Apostles preached are called *the preaching of the cross* (1 Cor. i. 18;) the doctrine of a crucified Saviour; his death on the cross

for the sins of the world. O that this ever were, O that this may ever be, the grand and distinguishing feature of the discourses of all that minister in holy things! Nothing else is the scriptural way of preaching—nothing else if blessed of God.

You have here, then, Christian reader, a test of that which is the true Gospel of Christ. Wherever Christ is not exhibited as the principal subject of the sermon, or other truths are preached without any connexion with this leading truth, there, there is not the pure light of Christianity. O, then, pray for your ministers, that they may know more of Christ themselves, and preach him more simply, and fully, as the only hope of fallen man!

This doctrine is effective of the most important results. It has two very important but very different and opposite effects. *The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us which are saved, it is the power of God.*—Those who are lost, reject it as folly; those who are saved receive it as the power of God.

A rejection of the Gospel LEAVES MEN UNDONE. *If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.* They reject the gratuitous pardon, and the free salvation which the Sovereign of all worlds sets before them. The WISE and LEARNED of this world, like the philosophers of old, puffed up with pride and conceit of their own superior wisdom, will not comprehend the doctrine of the cross, and disdain to come with others as poor perishing sinners, guilty, condemned, and undone, for a free salvation. This doctrine was *foolishness to the Greek* formerly, and it is, alas! too evident, that it is still foolishness to many who have genius, and talent, and learning, and every thing, but a heart subjected to the mind and will of God. O let us pray to be delivered from the pride of fancied knowledge, and ask for the simplicity of a little child, in receiving the doctrines of the Gospel!

The SELF-RIGHTEOUS count this foolishness, as the Pharisees of old did. These will not part with their fancied worthiness. Nothing is more contrary to their state of mind than to be called on to renounce all hope in any goodness or merit of their own, and to descend on a level with the vilest sinner as to justification before God, and build every hope on free and unmerited grace, through a crucified Lord. Hence they exclaim against it, as opening the flood-gates of sin, and count nothing too severe to say against those who maintain this doctrine. The LOVER OF THE WORLD thinks the doctrine of the cross to be foolishness. That doctrine proclaims the immense value of spiritual things, and the vanity of all worldly things. While it shows that the favour of God is better than life itself, it at the same time declares that *the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, shall pass away*. Hence it disturbs him in the pursuit of his worldly plans. It is incompatible with his favorite objects. The ANTINOMIAN, who boasts of his regard to the cross, and despises others, and thinks that it will allow him to live as he pleases, and gratify his sinful appetites; after all, the true doctrine of the cross is foolishness to him also. He dislikes its practical tendency. He shrinks from the real cross. He marks not the corresponding obligations to deny ourselves, and follow Christ.

Thus in various and opposite ways, men reject the only way of salvation. May every reader examine his own heart, and compare his present state with that described in the word of God; and in doing so, may the blessed Spirit discover to each of us our real character, and lead us to a true, a cordial, and an entire reception of the Gospel.

God seems to have made this method of salvation the means of more strikingly manifesting the characters of ungodly men, as well as of conveying his grace to his people. Those who love their sins, those who are covetous, proud, sensual, and ambitious, and will not see the evil of

their course, nor part with their iniquities, presumptuously arraign *the wisdom of God* and perish for ever: they perish also with an aggravated ruin,—*Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God—it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.* The Gospel, if it does not soften, hardens; if it does not save, it condemns to greater ruin.

O what a ruin is this! Who can consider it aright, without being ready to weep day and night for such souls as might escape it, and will not! To be lost, and that for ever! What words can describe the unutterable woe! All peace and all joy, all goodness and all happiness, lost, for ever lost! The society of the redeemed, the company of angels, the presence and knowledge of him who is the source of all blessedness, the benignant Father of mercies and God of all comfort, the gracious Saviour, the full Comforter of his people;—these, with all the bliss and glory of Heaven's eternal mansions, lost, for ever lost! Then, in the place of these, the fire that never can be quenched, the worm that never dies, perpetual wickedness, incessant disquietude, the torturing and never-ceasing anguish of guilt, the perpetual presence of accursed fiends this inexpressible and exhaustless misery to be endured even for ever!—O, rejecter of that Gospel, whoever you be, we would, with all possible earnestness, exhort you, we would tenderly and affectionately beseech you, *flee from the wrath to come!*

There will be this galling and torturing reflection, added to the other agonies of perdition,—a way of escape was provided, was proclaimed, and was proposed to them; but they counted that very way, in which the wisdom of God is most wonderfully displayed to the highest intelligences and the brightest seraphs above, they counted it—(O, sad effect of the madness of the fallen heart, and the inexpressible delusion of Satan, putting darkness for light and

light for darkness, calling good evil and evil good!)—they counted it foolishness! They even, trusting in their own lie, spurned it from them with the utmost contempt, proudly preferred their own vain imaginations, and chose their own device, leading them to eternal destruction. O, if any have trifled hitherto, trifle no longer! Read your Bible with fervent prayer, earnestly imploring the influences of the Holy Spirit; and thus acting, never shall you be left to count the Gospel foolishness, and so to perish for ever.

There is, blessed be God, another far different and an infinitely happy effect produced by the Gospel. It is THAT system of DOCTRINE WHICH GOD BLESSES TO the SALVATION of those that hear and receive it. This happy effect of hearing begins in, and is marked by, quite an opposite estimate of the Gospel, to that which we have already considered. What the men of this world regard as an unintelligible doctrine, as folly and absurdity, is to the humble-Christian an exhibition of the stupendous power and unsearchable wisdom of Almighty God. The creation of the world displayed his wisdom and power: but the redemption and recovery of a ruined world, the restoration of offending creatures, the pardon of guilty rebels by the Holy God, and their obtaining the favour of a just, righteous, and eternal Being;—here was a work to which nothing was equal but infinite wisdom and almighty power! The change made in a corrupt and polluted heart, the daily victory over sin and Satan, the coming out and being separate from a world lying in wickedness,—for this nothing is effective but the Gospel, by which, through his Spirit, God works in us, and strengthens us.

The effects of the Gospel manifest that it is indeed the power of God. View Saul breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, riding to Damascus in all the rage of a cruel persecutor. He hears the voice of the Gospel,—*I am Jesus whom thou persecutest!* At

once the tempest is stilled; the lion becomes a lamb. He asks,—*What wilt thou have me to do?* View the jailer at Philippi, after Paul and Silas had received many stripes cruelly neglecting their wounds thrusting them into the inner prison and making their feet fast in the stocks. No sooner does he hear the voice of the Gospel, than, the same hour of the night, he takes them, washes their stripes, brings them into his house, sets meat before them, and rejoices, believing, with all his house. The personal experience of Christians gives them individual proof of the same power. Those who were once covetous, sensual proud, earthly-minded, and those who had gone still farther in iniquity, and were perhaps once drunkards, swearers, sabbath-breakers, or fornicators; such, when converted, and made new creatures in Christ Jesus, can, from their own experience, testify that the Gospel is the power of God.—And wherever such a change is effected, there is salvation begun—there is a blessed token and pledge of future glory.

And who can fully declare the value of this salvation? Even in this life, to have a relief from the guilt and burden of sin; to have sufficient strength afforded us against the power of the enemy; to have the spirit of adoption and the hope of glory, may well gladden the heart in the midst of the greatest temporal sorrows. But eternity, though it will more fully discover the value of this salvation, will never exhaust it. To be among the saved at last; to lie in Abraham's bosom; to associate ever with the spirits of just men made perfect; to be free from all sin, and free to all holiness; to be without any curse, pain, or sorrow, and to be so filled with every blessing as to have, in the expressive language of Scripture, *fullness of joy*; to see Jesus, and ever be with him; to behold God as he is, and know as we are known—boundless, unutterable, ever-enduring, and unalloyed bliss; this is the salvation which God has connected with the faithful hearing and due reception of Christ's word!

O, Christian reader! that you and the writer may thus be blessed!

We may hence learn NOT TO JUDGE OF THE GOSPEL BY THE OPINION OF WORLDLY MEN. They may be very wise in the things of this world; replenished with literature, genius, and talents; acute, sensible, shrewd in worldly things; and with all this, they may count the Gospel plan of salvation foolishness. But let this guard us against so great a snare; the Bible says it is foolishness to them that perish. Will you abide by the opinion of those who shall in the great day of judgment be condemned of God, and perish for ever? O, no! you can have no wish to follow them to eternal ruin.

Never be content till you EXPERIENCE THE SAVING POWER OF THE GOSPEL. Is hearing the great means appointed of God for the recovery of our souls? we should use this means for this end. Are you unconverted? come, looking that the very next sermon may be God's opportunity for your conversion. Are you cold, and lukewarm? Attend on his preached word, that you may be warmed and enlivened. Are you in a worldly state of mind? Go to hear, that your affections may be set on heavenly things. Are you strong in the Lord? Still go for that which you still need, the increase of faith, hope, and love. Pray for the gift of the Holy Ghost, and so shall the preached Gospel become powerful and efficacious. Often where the word has been little attended to at first, as at Corinth (Acts xviii.) it has been subsequently gladly received. Bishop Jewell says,—“God knoweth whom he will bring to be of his fold, and make to hear his voice. Many times he blesseth his word with great increase among them which at the first despise it, and entreat cruelly the preachers and messengers thereof.”

CHAP. III.

THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST THE GLORY OF CHRISTIAN ASSEMBLIES.

It was a remarkable appeal that Solomon made in his affecting prayer at the dedication of the temple;—*Will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less the house that I have builded!* 1 Kings viii. 27. This was an instance of divine condescension and favour that could not be sufficiently admired and celebrated. The same condescending goodness is manifested in Christian assemblies. To them the presence of the Lord God, our Saviour, is promised, and we may ask, with admiration, ‘Does he, who is the Lord of Glory, the Creator of all things, the Redeemer of all men, still dwell on the earth?’ Behold, *all power is given unto him in heaven and earth!* Will he, then, be present when his people meet together? He will be; and he will manifest himself in his appointed assemblies.

When he gave his commission to his disciples to preach the Gospel, he at the same time gave them the encouraging assurance,—*Lo, I am with you always, to the end of the world.* Wherever his Gospel is preached, and his servants are gathered together to hear that Gospel, there he will always be among them, through all ages, to the end of time, manifesting his presence, and pouring out his blessing. Agreeing with this assurance is the gracious promise,—*Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*

Nor is this a blessing of small moment, as we shall see in more particularly noticing what is the peculiar nature of the presence of Christ in such assemblies.

It is a real, a manifested, and a beneficial presence, through the power of his Holy Spirit.

It is a REAL presence. Though our Lord Christ be invisible to our bodily sight, still he is truly present; he is actually among his people, though they see him only by the eye of faith; the expression, *There am I in the midst of them*, sufficiently declares this. In another place, he also thus describes the same truth; (Rev. ii. 1.) *These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks*. How solemn and affecting, how reviving and delightful, is the thought, that Jesus Christ walks in the midst of Christian assemblies! He, in the emphatic language of Scripture, *inhabits the praises* of his people. His eye observes every individual. He notices every mind, and discerns every heart. Unseen, he governs the whole assembly.

It is also a MANIFESTED presence; a presence that his people know and enjoy. He assured the Apostles that he would *manifest himself* to them. John xiv. 21. When his people are assembled together, he meets them; while they hear his word, credit his promises, and rely on his grace, he gives them his Spirit, he lifts up the light of his countenance upon them, and fills them with peace. He that has experienced this, understands it in a way that it is impossible to make equally intelligible to a mind filled with the world, and vanity, and sin. The Christian knows that he has often found the presence of Christ *in the midst of the congregation*: he has there had realizing views of his Being, his nearness, and his goodness, and has enjoyed sensible communion with him. In drawing *nigh to God*, he has found the truth of the promise,—*he will draw nigh to you*. James ix. 8. It is this that fills Christian assemblies with a cloud:

of greater glory than filled the house of God when Solomon dedicated the temple. Without the manifested presence of Christ, public preaching is but a cold and heartless service. The most humble and the very poorest assembly of real Christians, wherever they meet, has a glory that far excels any mere grandeur of edifice, largeness of company, splendor of rank, and external pomp of worship. O, did Christians really feel and enjoy the presence of Christ while hearing his word, how would his house be crowded and overflow with devout, and teachable, and humble worshippers! The dignity and honour, the joy and happiness, of meeting so glorious a Being, would be a sufficient motive to make us constantly frequent the place where we could find him. Christian Reader! fix your heart on this blessing when you assemble with your fellow Christians to hear the word of Christ.

Need we add farther, that this is a most BENEFICIAL presence? Our Lord, in promising to be with his people, manifestly designed to encourage and comfort them with the assurance of an important benefit. So the Lord promised Israel,—*In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee and will bless thee.* Exod. xx. 24. To his humble followers, mourning for sin, depressed by their guilt, desiring to trust in him, and longing to serve him, his presence is replete with the richest blessings. When he says, *I am there*, it is as if he said, The very fountain head of all truth and wisdom, all power and holiness, all mercy and loving-kindness, is there. Where Christ is, there is the full, and inexhaustible, and overflowing spring of all spiritual blessing, all present and eternal good and happiness. Where Christ is, there is the propitiation for our sins, there is the throne of grace, there is God our portion, and our happiness forever. Look at the relations which he sustains towards us. He is our PROPHET. The minister teaches, but Christ only brings what is taught home with

power to the heart. He is our PRIEST. The minister is but an ambassador; his object is to direct you to go to the great Mediator, the Lord Christ: only that blessed High Priest *bears the iniquity of our holy things*, atones for our guilt, and intercedes in our behalf. While the minister is preaching, let your heart be led to Jesus, as the only channel by which spiritual blessings are to come. He is our KING, the King of the whole earth, that King, who alone can change the mind, renew the heart subdue Satan, and give spiritual strength to the souls of men. He will, *he must reign till he has put all enemies under his feet*.

It is especially BY HIS SPIRIT that CHRIST MANIFESTS HIS PRESENCE. When he comforted his disciples with the assurance, *I will come to you*, he explained his meaning, by showing that the Father would send the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, in his name, who would come and abide with them for ever; see John xiv. 16, 18, 26. The ordinances of the Gospel are peculiarly the institutions of Christ, ordained by himself as a means and pledge of enjoying his presence, grace and love. We may say of them, *My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies*. Sol. Song, vi. 2. How blessed would the church be if every believer brought Christ with him, and could, in the ardent language of faith and experience, say, *I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him and would not let him go, till I had brought him into my mother's house!* Sol. Song, iii. 4. The Spouse was not content till she had brought him into the Church.

Christ, then, in all his fulness and blessedness, with all his unsearchable riches, is to be found on earth, is to be found among his people. *In Judah is God known; his name is great in Israel. In Salem also is his tabernacle, and his dwelling-place in Zion.* Ps. lxxvi. 1, 2.

Do you inquire, **HOW MAY I ENJOY THIS BLESSING?** O that we really believed that it could be obtained, and were earnestly desiring it! Bishop Beveridge says,—“If our blessed Saviour were now upon earth, what flocking would there be from all parts to see him; and if he was but in any part of this kingdom, how remote soever, which of us would but strive to go to him? What haste should we make, what pains should we take, to get as near to him as we could, that we might not only see him, but enjoy his company, and hear some of his divine discourses from his own mouth! With what profound reverence should we approach unto his presence! How attentively should we hearken to every word that came from him! How glad should we be to see him smiling upon us, and owning us for his servants and disciples! And when we had been awhile in his company, how loth should we be to leave him! How apt should we be to cry out, as St. Peter did at the transfiguration, *Lord, it is good for us to be here!* There is a way whereby we may meet with our blessed Saviour every day in the year, and enjoy his presence as effectually, to all intents and purposes, as if he now dwelt among us, as he did once among the Jews, in our own nature.” We have his own blessed assurance, that he is with his disciples whenever they meet *in his name*.

Make it, then, your great aim and desire to **MEET IN THE NAME OF CHRIST**. Do not come to hear because it is expected of you, or you wish for something to talk about, or you want to be amused or excited, or desire to say you have heard such a preacher; but meet *in the name of Christ*. In order to do this, go to hear **AS HIS DISCIPLES**, as those who belong to him and desire to be taught by him. Go, **IN DEPENDENCE ON HIS PROMISES**; there are many great and precious promises given to those that hear. Let David's feelings, then, be yours with reference to those promises;—*Unto thee lift I up mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the*

heavens. *Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eye of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress, so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God, until he have mercy upon us.* Ps. cxxxiii. 1, 2. Go, IN OBEDIENCE TO HIS AUTHORITY. He says seven times to the churches in Asia,—*He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.* Let the will, and precept, and direction of Christ be your main reason for hearing; and finally, go WITH A STEADFAST EYE TO HIM AS YOUR MEDIATOR. In order truly to meet in the name of Christ, we must trust in him as our only Saviour, aspire after the blessings of his salvation, rely on his atonement, come to God through him, submit to his word, and yield ourselves to the influences of his good Spirit.

O Christians! let us never be content with the outward ordinance, without real communion with Christ in it; and should we not yet have obtained this, at least may we feel a hungering and thirsting after it, and diligently seek it till we find it.

CHAP. IV.

THE HOLY SPIRIT, RECEIVED IN HEARING, THE ONLY SOURCE OF GENUINE PROFIT.

All men are, by nature, averse to divine truth, and would reject it; and various motives, besides love of the truth, may produce an outward attendance on the ministry. Man's own natural good disposition makes not the difference which we see among those who attend the same ministry. Neither is the wisdom of the minister that which produces Christian dispositions. The whole difference is from divine grace. This is so obvious, and so admitted by real Christians, that while the Apostle asks the question, he thinks it needless to give the answer,—*Who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?* 1 Cor. iv. 7.

The whole subject may be practically brought before us under the assertion of the Apostle,—*Neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God, that giveth the increase.* This assertion was not made by a novice in religion,—it was not made by a wild enthusiast,—it was not made by an unsuccessful minister,—it was not asserted merely as the conviction of human wisdom;—but it is the divinely-inspired dictate of the Holy Ghost.

Human agents of themselves CANNOT CONVERT THE SOUL. Look at our state by nature, as described in the Holy Scriptures, *dead in trespasses and sins.* What can the dead do of themselves? What human being can give life to the dead? It is evident from the scriptural account of our nat-

ural state, that we can neither convert our own hearts, nor those of others.

There is one plain and obvious passage on this point that cannot be mistaken. St. John, describing the true spring of regeneration, and our adoption into the family of God, says of the sons of God (John i. 13)—*They were born not of blood*, not by natural descent, or earthly power, *nor of the will of the flesh*, not by their own, or any other innate good disposition, or desire, *nor of the will of man*, nor by the power of understanding and reason, or any persuasion, influence, desire, or efforts of their fellow-creatures,—these are not the first causes and true springs of this great change; *but they were born of God*; of him alone, as going before, providing and prospering all other means, and to whom alone must be ascribed all the praise and glory.

Human agents cannot of themselves EDIFY THOSE WHO ARE CONVERTED, or carry on the work of divine grace. Men still retain, when converted, a carnal nature; and though that be mortified, and brought under by a divine counteracting power, yet there are strong remains of it, and it is still enmity against God; and fresh *supplies of the Spirit of Jesus Christ* (Phil. i. 19) day by day, can alone enable us to vanquish and overcome our corruption. Without me, says the only-wise Lord, whatever man may say, *without me ye can do nothing*. The Apostle excludes both minister and people from all share in imparting or procuring spiritual good. *We are not sufficient*, says the holy Paul, *to think anything as of ourselves—Neither is he that watereth anything*.

Success in hearing, and growth in grace, do not primarily depend on the ministry. Who more able, or wise, or holy, than Paul? Who more eloquent or mighty in the Scriptures, than Apollos? But Paul plants, and Apollos waters in vain, except as *God giveth the increase*. 1 Cor. iii. 4—7. In the largest success which the Gospel ever had, preached by the Apostles or any others, though multitudes receiv-

ed the Gospel, we never find that ALL who heard believed and were converted.

The learning and human qualifications of the hearer are not the true spring of improvement. The Apostle says (1 Cor. i. 26) *Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called; but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise.* Nor does a growing improvement of the word depend on man's natural goodness, nor on any natural power or effort in man: *it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth; but of God that showeth mercy.* Well it is that it does not depend upon us; every experienced Christian heartily concurs in the sentiment of the Apostle, *In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing.* We have no naturally holy dispositions, inducing us to love divine truth, and embrace it, and duly improve it. Those dispositions by which we do so, come from the special grace and mercy of God. How humbling is this doctrine; and yet it is the very groundwork of all true faith, repentance, humility, hope, love and happiness!

If it be objected against such a statement, that its tendency is to produce indolence and despondency—that it leads to a disregard and neglect of human instruments and efforts—we reply, By no means. And the very figure by which the Holy Scripture illustrates the doctrine, furnishes a sufficient answer to such an objection. Shall the husbandman never plough, nor harrow, nor sow, because he cannot make the seed shoot and grow, and spring up, nor command the sun to shine, nor cause the rain to descend? Shall the gardener never plant, because he cannot make his plant take root and flourish, and bear fruit, without the heavenly influence? He uses the means, and God gives the blessing. Let us do the same thing, and we shall as surely receive a blessing. *Faith comes by hearing;* that is, the divinely appointed method for conversion and growth in grace.

Where preaching is neglected and despised, there religion does not flourish. Where Christ is proclaimed to attentive hearers, there, invariably, a blessing follows. *The word does not return void, but prospers in the thing whereto God sends it.*

Should any go so far as to ridicule all expectations of divine grace as folly or enthusiasm, let them remember, that they do, in fact, ridicule all prayer and worship of God, and all religious services. There are persons who make a conscience of outward worship, and yet laugh at the very meaning of the prayers which they offer.

But, though the insufficiency of man's teaching should not lead us to disregard and neglect the ministry, it should teach us not to overvalue human instruments, or set one against another. The Apostle had to reprove this fault—*While one saith, I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos, are ye not carnal?* This is an error into which even good men are apt to fall. Mr. Cecil remarks, "I once said to myself, in the foolishness of my heart, What sort of a sermon must that have been which was preached by St. Peter, when three thousand souls were converted at once? What sort of sermon? such as other sermons! There is nothing to be found in it extraordinary. The effect was not produced by his eloquence, but by the mighty power of God present with his word. It is in vain to attend one minister after another, and to hear sermon after sermon, unless we pray that the Holy Spirit accompany his word."

Let us then *cease from man*. They who fancy any human being, however great or excellent, to be the only means of their conversion or edification, are guilty of idolatry, and transfer to the creature, that regard and confidence which are due only to the Creator. Be afraid of being lavish in extolling man, or thinking highly of the creature. Faithful ministers dread to receive human praise, lest God should be dishonored.

These things amply show the weakness and insufficiency of man, without the grace of God to convert and edify the soul.

But, blessed be God, this is only part of the truth, and the humbling part; there is another part of the subject full of consolation. While man can, of himself, do nothing; *through Christ strengthening him, he can do all things*; and God, who commands the seed to be sown, himself *giveth the increase*.

The form in which the Apostle speaks when he says, *God giveth the increase*, claims attention, as it excludes the hearer as well the preacher. The Apostle does not say the hearer of the word produces the increase from the good use of his own powers. The views which some entertain, had they been correct, would have led to such a mode of expression. They would have said, All depends on the state of your own mind. If you have a good heart, and a right disposition, then you will hear with advantage. This is very true in one way, but very false in another. It is true, if we duly regard God's grace, making the heart good, and giving suitable dispositions, and blessing the ministry of the word: but it is false, if we imagine any man has by nature a good heart; for where is the heart naturally disposed to spiritual and heavenly things? where is the man with a truly holy disposition, or that has by his own power and ability acquired it? None such can be found. The special grace of God is wanting for that very preparation of the heart which is needful for our hearing aright; or, in the words of the XXXIX. Articles, "We have no power to do good works, pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us [that is, preceding or going before us,] that we may have a good will, and working with us when we have that good will."

The expression, "*giveth the increase*," however, suggests that it pleases God to work through the instrumentality of man. It is not 'God makes the Christian without means,' 'God does the work without employing man's agency;' but the expression is such as to show that man must plant and water, and faithfully use all the appointed means, or he cannot expect the wished-for increase.

On those very points on which the Scriptures declare the insufficiency of man, they fully express the power of divine grace in conjunction with the word.

Thus God CONVERTS THE SOUL. He promises it as his work—*A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.* Ezek. xxxvi. If any have spiritual life, the Apostle shows them where to ascribe all the praise—*God, who is rich in mercy, of the great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ.*

And this great change is BY MEANS OF THE WORD. St. James (i. 18) speaks very expressly on this point—*Of his own will begat he us, with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures; wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear.* St. Peter is equally decisive—*Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever—and this is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you.* 1 Pet. i. 23—25. Thus all glory is taken from man, and given to God; and yet the means of salvation which God blesses, are specially noticed. So the Apostle Paul tells the Thessalonians, *God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth.*

Then look at the history of God's dealings with his church. The best human instruments, as we have shown, were insufficient, when God did not work by his Spirit. The

weakest are mighty through him. Whom did God appoint to convert the world? Philosophers, statesmen, orators, the learned and the wise? No! the very reverse. *God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise.* 1 Cor. i. 27—29.

Our reformers felt strongly their need of divine grace. "Without this grace," says Jewell, you can do nothing. The words of the preacher enter in at the ear; the Spirit of God conveyeth them to the heart."

The state of the church of Christ in our own day manifests the same truth. Where there may be deep learning, great talent, and many external qualifications, but Christ is not preached, and his Spirit is not honoured, and the great doctrines of his Gospel are adulterated or concealed, no spiritual good is done, not a single soul is converted from the error of his way. And we have seen in other cases God has been pleased to use a preacher with very little learning, but with much zeal and love, and a devoted heart, and to make him, though insignificant in the eyes of the world, and perhaps one who really speaks and acts in some respects indiscreetly, yet to make him the successful instrument of conveying his grace to many immortal souls. His design is the same now as in the days of the Apostles, *that no flesh should glory in his presence. He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.*

It is only the same divine grace that is efficacious TO EDIFY THE CONVERTED MAN.

It is true, that the ministry of the word is the means of edification. It is appointed of God for that purpose. Eph. iv. 11, 12. *He gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors, and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.*

Yet it is but the means, and effectual only as the Holy Ghost makes it so. The Apostle, in the case of the Thes-

salonians, puts this distinction very clearly and expressly. They were greatly edified by his preaching, and he shows why they were so; *our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.*

That the Holy Spirit is the only efficient cause of all spiritual edification, might easily be shown at length, by going through all the graces of the advanced Christian, and marking how his faith, his repentance, humility, love to God, and deadness to the world, are given him from above. One passage may suffice—*the fruit of the Spirit* (not of our natural power and disposition, not of the talents of man, not of eloquence and learning,) *the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.*

The experience of Christians corresponds with this statement. The same truths have a very different effect on our minds at different times, when we can assign no ordinary cause adequate to account for this difference. At one time it pleases God justly to withhold that grace to which we have no claim, and can only receive at any time, of unmerited mercy; and at another time in boundless mercy and undeserved love, *he worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure.*

The variety which we may observe among real Christians springs from *one and the self-same Spirit dividing to every man severally as he will.* There is no Christian disposition of which he is not the author. The lukewarm Christian seeks not, or seeks not constantly and earnestly, this aid. The devoted Christian, quickened by the Spirit of Christ, has sought and obtained a large supply of the Spirit.

How invaluable then is HEARING THE TRUTH AS ONE OF THE ORDINARY AND APPOINTED MEANS BY WHICH GOD CONVEYS THE HOLY SPIRIT? This is the way in which God bestows his grace. *We receive the promise of the Spirit by the hearing of*

faith; it is that divinely-instituted plan, with which God's power concurs. It has been observed by Maclaurin, that there are two great principles of Christianity, distinguishing it from all other religions. "1. That the knowledge of Christ Jesus, the doctrine of God's grace, is the means of turning our souls to God, and of cleansing us from our filthiness and our idols. And then, 2. That though that doctrine be an excellent means of turning us to God, that it is but a means, that it is but an instrument; the efficacy of it depends upon the manifestation of the power of God, *that exceeding greatness of power* that raises souls from the dead." O Christian reader, if you would derive profit in hearing, we beseech you mainly to look for God's help and blessing! No preacher in the world can do you good without God's special grace. While you go to hear, say with the Psalmist, *Unto thee lift I up mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens*. Let us, if we really desire spiritual blessings, look more to the Lord, the Spirit, and come to the Christian assembly, hear while in that assembly, and return from it, in the spirit of prayer. Thus hearing, the sermons, even though they should be poor in themselves, will be blessed to our spiritual and eternal good.

CHAP. V.

THE DUTIES OF HEARERS TOWARDS THEIR MINISTERS.

The New Testament makes it sufficiently clear, that, from the beginning of the Gospel, there has ever been a peculiar body of men set apart for the instruction and edification of the church, and states in various parts the duties owing to them by their people. Let us consider then the duties owing to ministers.

1. TO HEAR THEM. Ministers should be heard, where it is practicable, by their stated congregations whenever they preach. But is not attendance on them often a matter of caprice and momentary feeling? Do not sometimes such conversations arise as these—"Will you go to church this morning?"—"No; it looks cloudy"—or, "It is foggy"—or, "It is cold"—or, "It is hot"—or, "It rains"—or, "I am tired"—or, "Mr. Such-a-one only preaches—I will stay quietly at home and read a book." This is not right. Such excuses would not be made if a party of friends were to be visited. We allow that there are cases of sickness and delicate health which furnish a sufficient reason for not going under certain circumstances. We allow that very little children cannot be brought without disturbance, (though there are advantages in accustoming children from early years to come,) and that where they cannot come, some one must stay at home to take care of them; but the case may surely thus be put with fairness, and yet, if so put, how many will it condemn—that no impediment is a satisfactory objection which is not also found a sufficient impediment to keep you from taking those pleasures which require

similar efforts! At other times, such remarks as these are made—"There is an eminent preacher to occupy such a pulpit—there is something peculiar in such a place of worship; let us go there." The being absent whenever a stranger is to be heard, does not show steadiness of Christian character. Times may be commonly taken for hearing strangers which do not interfere with regular (we should not say undeviating) attendance on a stated minister, or at a stated place. Roving about among Christians, more than quite staying away, seems to be the prevailing evil. *Regular* hearing at stated places is of great importance; but there are those who err on the other side; they are always hearing, running after different preachers, and that to the neglect of duties. They have been compared to Pharaoh's lean cattle—always eating, but still ill-favoured. *Patient* hearing is another part of the same duty; we see tokens of impatience when persons are turning round to look at the clock, or are manifestly restless during the sermon, or hastening out before the blessing.

2. TO ESTEEM THEM. Are not ministers, even when good men, sometimes slighted and neglected, not only by the ignorant and rude, but by those who from their situation in life should know better? If ministers do not happen to have commanding or popular talents, or great learning or private property, they are put in the back ground and trodden upon. How contrary is this to the express direction of Holy Scripture!—*We beseech you, brethren, to know them who labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake.* 1. Thess. v. 12. Surely the very circumstances of a man's having fewer worldly commendations will only be another argument with a generous and Christian mind for more special courtesy and attention. Is he a humble, patient, self-denying, faithful laborer? *receive him in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such in reputation.*

Is he defective in any point? remember his office; and you will act towards him as you would in the case of the failings of a revered parent. Even St. Paul had defects; and it is recorded in honour of the Galatians, *Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the Gospel unto you at the first, and my temptation, which was in my flesh, ye despised not, nor rejected.* Gal. iv. 13, 14.

It is a very important part of this esteem not to listen to, or catch up, foolish, silly, or scandalous tales, which are always afloat respecting any public character, and almost invariably originate in gross mistake, if not in entire falsehoods. It is very injurious to propagate such things; and persons who do so are often unconscious how materially they may impair the effects of ministerial labours. The scriptural rule is, *Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses.* 1 Tim. v. 19.

3. To OBEY THEM. Whatever they require, from God's word, comes with additional force and obligation, from its having been brought before us by his appointed minister. *He that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God.* The express directions of Scripture on this point are very plain. *Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves, for they watch for your souls as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief, for that is unprofitable for you.* Heb. xiii. 17. True it is, ministers must not be obeyed against, or beyond the written word; and true it is that we must judge for ourselves as to the principles of divine truth from that word, as the only ultimate reference; and we may differ from them in various particulars, and yet, differing with reluctance and prayer, still hear aright: but do not many think little or nothing of the obligation of obedience, where the minister's instruction is supported by, and founded on, the word of God, and all his aim to make them conformable to that word?

4. TO PROVIDE FOR THEM, is another duty of hearers towards their ministers. The Apostle Paul, who could the more easily speak on this point to those churches among whom he *used none of these things*, writes very decidedly on this point, and that at considerable length. 1 Cor. ix. 7—25. He declares, *So hath the Lord ordained, that they which preach the Gospel, should live of the Gospel*; and expressly tells the Thessalonians, *Let him that is taught in the word communicate to him that teacheth in all good things*. Now, not to speak of the frauds and keeping back of just dues by which many ministers are yearly robbed of that which is their right, it is evident, if these scriptural precepts were duly regarded, we should not have many ministers in the greatest difficulties for a maintenance, and others so scantily provided for, that, had they not private property, or other means besides the produce of their ministry, they and their families would actually want bread.

5. TO PRAY FOR THEM, is a still more important duty, and greatly pressed upon hearers by the sacred writers. How urgent the most successful of all ministers, St. Paul, was on this point—*Brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you*. 2 Thess. iii. 1. And again, *Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me*. Rom. xv. 30. And again, *Praying always, . . . and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the Gospel*. Ephes. vi. 18—20. There is hardly an Epistle without a request of this kind (2 Cor. i. 11; Col. iv. 3; 1 Thess. v. 25); a request that, coming from an inspired Apostle, in a letter to be the directory of the church in future ages, comes with all the sanctions of a divine precept to Christians in every age. Here then is a point of vast magnitude, both with regard to the usefulness of ministers, and the edification and

comfort of their hearers. How often have you prayed for your minister? Does this come in every day's prayer? Can you expect to derive profit from his ministry without this spirit of prayer? Ministers are but the channels of good; the Spring Head is above. O, by faith and prayer for your minister, open the fountains of that unfathomable and exhaustless fulness, that may ever flow, replenishing your ministers, and descending in rich abundance to your own soul. The union of prayer in families and in social meetings is here especially important.

6. Hearers should CO-OPERATE WITH THEIR MINISTER IN HIS VARIOUS PLANS FOR THE GOOD OF OTHERS, and promoting religious and benevolent institutions. A load of secular business in many places falls on a minister, from which he might be relieved by judicious, educated, and pious laymen. Such men, in schools, in the forwarding of religious societies and the care of their accounts, and in larger parishes, in visiting the poor and the sick, might very materially, and do in many cases, very effectually aid their minister. Much more might be done through our country than is done, by the humble, prudent, and zealous co-operation of laymen. What a mass of ignorance, and darkness, and prejudice, and misery, is to be removed from the minds and dwellings of millions, even in our favoured country! Wise and faithful ministers, deeply sensible of the magnitude of the ministerial work, will rejoice to call in the help of judicious and pious laymen.

CHAP. VI.

DIRECTIONS FOR HEARING THE WORD.

Hearing the word aright is a duty of vast importance, which it will be desirable more fully to explain. We will first show what to guard against.

1. TAKE HEED TO YOUR MOTIVES IN GOING TO HEAR.—What is the object which you have in view? There are many unworthy ends, such as curiosity, criticism, entertainment, or even mere general information about religious topics. Hearing is not to gratify men's curiosity, but to save their souls; yet it is rather some novelty that attracts most men's attention, than the simple statement of the most solid truths. If we may judge of men's motives by their conversation, some come merely like the Athenians, to hear something new; some to know what will be said on any particular doctrines by the preacher, or to be able to talk about him, and his style, and manner of preaching; others come rather to see what is passing than to hear; but "to enter the house of God, to have our eyes and ears entertained, and not our hearts reformed, must certainly be most displeasing to God." Shall we spend the time in criticism, curious remarks and the like, when we should be eagerly listening to the message of divine mercy, following its directions, and embracing its blessings?

Take heed of INATTENTION. There is often a dulness of hearing very prejudicial to all success in attending upon the ministry. It was the case with the Jews of old. *Hear, says Isaiah, ye deaf, and look, ye blind, that ye may see;* and St. Paul, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, notices the

same thing—*Ye are dull of hearing, for when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again, which be the first principles of the oracles of God.* Heb. v. 11. Such are not dull as to temporal things; but of spiritual things they say, *What a weariness is it!* Mal. i. 18. They have similar feelings to those who asked, *When will the new moon be gone? that we may sell corn; and the sabbath? that we may set forth wheat.* Amos. viii. 5. It is observed by Cradock, that “A minister may have a great congregation, and yet but few hearers, if their minds be stuffed with the world before they come; if they bring their trades, their bargains, their plough, their worldly business, along with them. David says of idols, *They have ears, but hear not.* We have too many such idols in our congregations.” Some are asleep, even when they have no bodily infirmity to plead: what a dishonour do they put upon religion! what an infectious and evil example to others! what contempt of the presence of God! The Bible records one instance in which drowsiness had nearly been followed by irrecoverable death, to be, as it were, a warning to all sleepers. While every allowance should be made for natural weakness and infirmities, which disable some from that attention which they desire to give, and which it is their grief and burden that they cannot give; while we would give to such every advantage of our Lord’s kind remark, *The spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak*; yet such remember his question—*What! could ye not watch with me one hour?* And here much might be done by moderation in food, or by taking a short rest at home previously, or perhaps by standing up part of the time. But there are those who, though they have no natural infirmity, seem as soon as the sermon commences, to compose themselves as if they designed to sleep through it. O let such remember the majesty and dignity of the great Jehovah, in whose house they are assembled! How can they receive a mes-

sage from him, or obtain the gifts of his Spirit, or the riches of his grace, in such a drowsy state of mind!

Take heed of PREJUDICES. Some come to hear with their minds filled with their own notions. They have adopted high doctrinal views, and cannot bear to have practice insisted upon; or, on the other hand, they dislike to have the doctrines of the Gospel prominently brought forward, and had rather hear moral disquisitions on the excellence of virtue, which never trouble the conscience, nor renew the heart. They have an undue partiality for or against particular individuals. Prejudices may be taken up against the very best of ministers. Jeremiah had to complain in his day (Jer. vi. 10,) *To whom shall I speak, and give warning that they may hear? Behold! their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken! behold, the word of the Lord is to them a reproach, and they have no delight in it!* The Jews were prejudiced against our Lord Jesus Christ. They were offended with him on account of the meanness of his birth, (Matt. xiii. 57,) and therefore he could neither do any mighty works, nor preach the Gospel among them. Often on this account they rejected his words. We have a remarkable instance of this, Luke iv. 16—30. It is the gracious office of the Holy Spirit to remove prejudices from the mind, and therefore the Apostle prays, that the Ephesians might have given to them *the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ, the eyes of their understanding being enlightened.*

Take heed to PUT AWAY YOUR SINS. This direction is needful even for Christians. The Apostle James, speaking to those begotten *with the word of truth*, that is, truly regenerated and converted by the Gospel, tells them *to lay apart all filthiness, and superfluity of naughtiness.* The term *filthiness* denotes those lusts, appetites, and sins, which defile the soul, such as, all gluttony, drunkenness, excess, and uncleanness; all eager pursuit of worldly

things, needless indulgence of the body, covetousness, and earthly-mindedness. These things, under whatever name the world may sanction them, are to be laid apart as exceedingly opposite to truly receiving the word of God. The more our heart hankers after or desires, or relishes, such things, the less we are disposed to regard divine truth. They are like superfluous and hurtful weeds, that take up the room of other things, and render the soil unprofitable; they hinder the reception and growth of the good seed. Then, *all superfluity of naughtiness*, the overflowings of malignity, as self-will, pride, and hatred, equally hinder the due reception of the word. Yet the regenerate man is not free from such temptations, and the inward working of the heart after such sins. St. Peter, speaking also to those born of God, tells them to lay *aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings*. These things are to be put away with godly sorrow for our natural corruption, and much care and earnestness.

Take heed of your MANY SPIRITUAL ENEMIES. Our Lord, in the parable of the sower, shows that *the devil comes and takes away the word from the heart*—that in time of temptation men fall away from the truth—and that the cares, riches, and pleasures of life, choke it. These are spiritual enemies that would rob our souls of all profit from the word of life. A discharge of needless worldly business; unusual feasting; taking your own carnal pleasure; unnecessary joining in worldly society; or reading trifling books, especially such publications as Sunday or other newspapers, on that holy day on which the word of God is especially to be heard, will assuredly be giving many advantages to our spiritual enemies. Self-righteousness is another adversary, the more dangerous because it is the least suspected. This leads us to imagine that when we have attended to hear, we have done something meritorious before God, and so we rest in the mere external ordinance. O how often do these

things make spoil of the spiritual benefits which we might otherwise receive! A request to take an *innocent* walk in the fields, conversation with idle company, neglect of retirement; these, and the like things, are occasions and means by which our great enemy takes away the word from our hearts.

We will now explain THE NATURE OF DUE HEARING. It consists in far more than the mere outward attendance on the ministry of the word, and taking an interest in what is heard. The Scribes and Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Jews in general who rejected our Savior, often attended upon him, and heard him, and witnessed his mighty works, and yet were not blessed thereby; but rather, by their perverseness, turned their privileges to their greater condemnation. The Scriptures give many instances of unprofitable hearing. In Ezekiel xxxiii. 31, 32, it is said, *They come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness: and, lo! thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument, for they hear thy words, but they do them not.* In Jeremiah (xliv. 16,) we have an instance of daring rejection of his word: *As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee; but we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth.* And so in the time of our Lord he had to declare, *They seeing, see not; and hearing, they hear not; neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing, ye shall see, and not perceive.*

When we rightly hear the words of Christ, there will be a SURE BELIEF of them. Our Lord commended this in Peter, who had declared, *Thou hast the words of eternal life, and we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son*

of the living God. The Apostles believed the divine testimony, they looked up to Jesus as a divine Instructor, and humbly and gladly received his doctrine as from God. The same sure belief should be yielded by us to the word of Christ.

There will also be a CORRESPONDING CONDUCT. Thus the Apostles not only believed, but left all and followed Christ. They obeyed his voice. It became the great object of their lives to fulfil the will of Christ. Their faith worked by love, and overcame the world. So will it be with us if we truly believe. We shall know how to prize our many privileges, and be deeply concerned duly to improve them.

And this is the result of SPECIAL GRACE. When Peter made that decisive confession of his faith, recorded Matt. xvi. 16, our Lord said to him, *Blessed art thou, Simon, Barjona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.* Here only is the true root of all the difference between the most devoted believer, and the most presumptuous rejecter of divine truth. *The hearing ear and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them.* Prov. xx. 12. This is true not only in a natural, but also in a spiritual sense. It is *given* to the disciples of Christ *to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God.*

III. We now proceed to the DIRECTIONS WHICH MAY ASSIST YOU TO HEAR WITH ADVANTAGE, only again stating that there is no direction which a gracious Father is not ready to enable us to follow, and which is not a privilege and a blessing to fulfil.

1, Hear IN THE SPIRIT OF PRAYER. Of all the directions that can be given, this is the most important; for no other can be practised without the help which prayer obtains. The power of the Lord alone gives us understanding. Luke xxiv. 45. David was well acquainted with divine truth, and an inspired prophet himself yet he often prays for divine teaching. Remember then at all times, the need of

prayer; *The things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. God alone giveth the increase.* Knowing and feeling this, we should go to hear his word with a praying heart; we should listen with many a secret ejaculation that God would send home what we hear to our hearts; we should return, praying that we may keep what we have heard to our spiritual and eternal good. Useless are all rules and directions as to our real good, until the Holy Ghost gives them life and power. On this point, then, may our hearts be deeply impressed. This rule condemns those who come into church when prayers are half over. There are cases where persons are unable to do more from their peculiar circumstances; but where this is done without a sufficient reason to excuse it, such persons cannot expect to receive any good; how can they, who throw a public slight on those prayers which express our dependence on the divine blessing, receive that blessing?

2. Hear in SIMPLICITY OF MIND. The doctrines of the Gospel are *revealed unto babes*. Come, then, with a disposition to be taught. Really desire to be made *wise unto salvation*. Come to hear with singleness of heart, earnestly desiring to know and do the will of God. The word will be profitable to the simple-minded and the sincere Christian. *As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word.* 1 Pet. ii. 2. *Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.* Matt. xviii. 3. *The wayfaring man* (one whose whole aim is single and sincere, looking only to arrive at the end of his journey,) *though a fool, shall not err therein.* Your simple object in hearing should be, to have your errors and mistakes detected your ignorance removed, your sins put away, the will of God discovered to you, all holiness promoted in you, and your soul blessed with all spiritual blessings in the use of those means, which God has appointed for conveying them. O that we may all desire to receive the word with the

same simplicity that we desire our daily meals, and have as earnest and keen an appetite for spiritual food, as a hungry man has for the food of the body!

3. HEAR WITH CANDOUR. The sacred historian records it to the honour of the Bereans, *These were more noble than those in Thessalonica: they were of a more ingenuous and candid spirit.* The Bereans did not at once conclude every thing to be false, which did not agree with their preconceived opinions. They were not the slaves of prejudice.— It has been well remarked, “True dignity and nobleness of spirit, greatly consists in an enlarged and unprejudiced mind, open to conviction, willing to investigate the truth, to examine the evidence adduced in support of men’s opinion, and to treat religious inquiries with candour, seriousness, and diligence. Such an ingenuous and teachable spirit comes from above.”

4. HEAR WITH SERIOUSNESS. When Moses had delivered the divine testimony to the children of Israel, he said, *Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day, . . . for it is not a vain thing, because it is your life.* Deut. xxxii. 46. The Apostle tells the Hebrews, *We ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.* Heb. ii. 1. A serious mind should be cultivated previous to going to the house of God. Is the word of God your life? consider how you listen, when a physician speaks to you about your own health, or about the health of your children, or beloved friends; how carefully you notice and follow his directions! If any great worldly advantage is mentioned as to be attained, how you listen to the account! how it dwells on your mind, and you think of it over and over again, and love to talk about it. So seriously and earnestly should you listen to the word of God, eagerly attending lest, to your personal and lasting injury, you lose any valuable direction. Your salvation is too serious a matter to

be trifled with. Remember, that God is very serious in sending his ministers to you; they are, if faithful, very serious in prayer for you, and in entreaties with you; the Holy Spirit is very serious in pleading with you, and the work of your salvation is the most serious work in which you can possibly be engaged.

5. HEAR WITH GLADNESS. A readiness to hear is another important part of preparation. *Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.* Of the Bereans it is said, *They received the word with all readiness of mind.* One cause of men's being given over to a spirit of delusion is; that they receive not the love of the truth. 2 Thess. ii. 10, 11. The first Christian received the word gladly. Acts ii. 41. A heart prepared of the Lord, eagerly and gladly welcomes his Gospel. Be willing to hear. It is the reluctance and backwardness of the natural heart to receive the humbling, holy, and sanctifying, though truly joyful doctrines of the Gospel, that hinders its success. We are offended, and we cavil: we dislike and we object to, the bread of life, after which we should hunger; and we turn away with disgust from those waters after which we should thirst. How different the Bereans, who heard with *all* readiness! The direction, *Let every man be swift to hear,* is full of importance, and indicative of that state of mind which God delights to bless. Here is the best preparation for a cordial reception of the truth. O that such a readiness to hear may be largely granted to all professing Christians, and be met by a wise and full declaration of the unsearchable riches of Christ from all the ministers of his word! We see a beautiful example of such readiness in Cornelius's family; and O that congregations of hearers could say as he said—*Now are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.*

6. **HEAR IN FAITH.** The Israelites in the wilderness having no faith in God's word, lost the promised blessings.—*The word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.* Heb. iv. 2. You would not dishonour your bosom friend, or a revered father, by distrusting his word; have then a generous confidence in God; have a sure conviction that he will not deceive you. All his threatenings must be fulfilled; all his promises shall be exactly accomplished. The precepts of the God of power, wisdom and love, cannot fail, if obeyed, to make you happy. His invitations to you, to partake of his mercies however rich, and full, and free those mercies are, are all made in truth. O believe them, confide in them, and rely upon them. Observe how children entirely trust their parents, and leave all consequences with them; and how the babe clings to its mother, and draws nourishment from her; so let us trust our far better, even our heavenly Parent; so let us cling to and embrace our Saviour Jesus Christ, and receive our supplies from his inexhaustible fulness. When Christ is preached by the minister, faith should be so exercised by the hearer, that he should be ready to say, as the Eunuch did to Philip, *I believe that Jesus is the Son of God.* When you hear of the divine anger, believe and fear lest you should endure that anger, and fly to him, *who has delivered us from the wrath to come.* When you hear his promises, believe them, be persuaded of them, and embrace them, and thus ensure to yourself an interest in them. "To hear and not believe," says Dr. Owen, "is in spiritual life, what to see meat and not to eat it, is in the natural; it will please the fancy, but never nourish the soul."

7. **Hear in the spirit of SELF-APPLICATION.** There are many who are very ready to think all that is said applies to others; or are thinking how it suits their friends. They hear for others, and not for themselves. When Peter, af-

ter our Lord's address to him, turns and asks about John, *Lord, what shall this man do?* he received a just reproof, *What is that to thee? follow thou me!* John xxi. 21. 22. The application of the sermon to ourselves is the first step towards receiving benefit. Are not many merely regarding the style and manner of the preacher, or the system and theory which he holds, without once thinking that they are personally concerned, and that life and death are set before them? There are, indeed, those who make a wrong application. If secure and careless, they will apply to themselves all the comfortable promises made to the righteous. If anxious and desponding, they appropriate to themselves all the descriptions of the wicked, and the threatenings made to their sins. Thus some speak to themselves *peace and safety*, when there is no peace for them in their present state; and others speak terror without a cause and make their hearts sad, when the Lord designs it not.—Now the true remedy for these evils is, to examine more carefully into their own characters, and ascertain their real state; and, above all, to pray for the enlightening of the Holy Spirit, who alone wisely and efficaciously applies divine truth, so as to regenerate, sanctify, and gladden the heart. Some are apt to think that the minister meant to preach to them in particular, because his sermons happen to touch their consciences and describe their character; let the faithful testimony of conscience, thus speaking plainly to you, not be trifled with. Hear personally and individually, and you shall receive a real and lasting blessing. At least, give the word this consideration, *What if it should be true? if this should be my state? if I am in this danger! if that danger should be thus tremendous!* such a thought has led to the conversion of the soul.

8. Hear in HUMILITY. God has called us *to receive with meekness the ungrafted word.* James i. 21. He has promised blessings to *those who tremble at his word.* Isa. lxvi. 2. He

requires that we should listen with reverence to his Son. Matt. xvii. 5. It is infinite condescension in the great God to address thus repeatedly and graciously fallen man. Let our humility and reverence in some degree correspond with his astonishing grace. Cultivate then a meek and docile spirit. With a meek spirit a man will not at once quarrel with what he hears, however it may appear to him mysterious and inexplicable, but will wait, in the posture of a learner, for clearer light. Instead of objecting to an awful denunciation, he will tremble at it; instead of doubting a gracious promise, he will desire an interest in it. Sensible of his own ill-deservings, and great depravity, convinced of his own ignorance and weakness, he feels the need of a revelation like the Gospel, full of mercies, and gladly receives it in its length and breadth: in all its doctrines, however contrary to the carnal mind, and however offensive to the proud heart; and in all its precepts, however strict, and however opposed to his self-indulging pleasures.

9. COMPARE ALL YOU HEAR WITH THE WRITTEN WORD OF GOD. This was the practice of the Bereans. Even when an inspired Apostle preached, they *searched the Scriptures daily whether these things were so.* Acts. xviii. 11. Nothing has any divine authority, but as it comes from God, or is according to his word. Yield your mind up then to the plain will of God, and to nothing else. Have a simple regard to his authority. As long as we receive doctrines merely on the word of ministers, we build our faith on human opinions, and it may be shaken by other human opinions: but when the Holy Scriptures are made the sole foundation of our faith, and we compare all we hear with the word of God, and receive it only as it is drawn from that pure fountain—we have then a divine testimony, and build on that which, like its great Author, is not variable, and cannot be shaken. There is a divine rule to prove *all things.* Hieron, an old writer, says, “It is not the counsel

of the Holy Ghost, because there is a spirit of error in the mouths of many, and the best learned may mistake; therefore cease to hear, but because it is thus, be sure to *try*.”—

10. Hear in the SPIRIT OF OBEDIENCE. The directions of St. James (i. 22—25) on this point are very express. Often ask yourself, How can I best discharge the duties that have been brought before me? How can I most carefully shun the sins that have been pointed out? Submit yourselves, your soul and body, your estate, your family, all you are and have, to God's holy word. Often lift up your heart in secret ejaculations, while hearing, with reference to this end—‘Lord, write this thy law in my heart!’—‘Lord, teach me to do thy will!’ If you hear in a spirit of obedience, you will hear with a desire personally to obey.—You will not be thinking of others, and be wishing, ‘O that such a one, my relation, my neighbor, my master, or mistress, or servant, heard this, it just suits them!’ let your thoughts rather be such as these—‘O let me take heed how I hear, that I may obey; this reaches my case—*here* I am guilty—*here* I must amend my ways—I am *the man* concerned—let me begin to practise this duty, to believe this promise, to rest on my Saviour, to seek his Holy Spirit, and to aim at his glory in all I do!’ Thus shall we receive the best profit by hearing. *If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.* John vii. 17.

PRAYER BEFORE HEARING.

O most gracious Jehovah, the Fountain of Light, and the Giver of all Wisdom; and my reconciled Father in Christ Jesus, I render to thee my grateful thanksgivings for the light of thy truth, and the many spiritual advantages which thou hast given to me.

Open, O Lord, I beseech thee, mine eyes, that I may know the hope set before me. Open mine ears to hear

thy truth, that I may receive it with all readiness of mind and meekness of spirit.

O may the blessed Spirit be my teacher, and sanctify me by thy truth. Give me grace to desire the sincere milk of the word. Give me a simple faith in every part of thy revealed truth, and an unfeigned submission of mind to it.

Remove far from me all prejudices. Deliver me from the love of darkness, from besetting sins, worldly fears, and whatever may obstruct a cordial reception of thy holy will.

O heavenly Father, my tender and compassionate God and Saviour, let me not be satisfied with hearing only; but may I receive Christ Jesus, the only Lord and Saviour, into my heart, and be filled with his Spirit, and enjoy that blessed fellowship which all thy people have with thee and thy Son Jesus Christ.

And let thy word have free course and be glorified, not only in my own soul, but among all that shall hear that word; and in every place, till it be known and received through the whole world, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

CHAP. VII.

THE IMPORTANCE OF REFLECTING UPON WHAT WE HAVE HEARD, WITH A PRAYER AFTERWARDS.

If we rest satisfied with mere hearing, without reflection, we shall never attain pure and undefiled religion. A person may hear and admire at the time, and yet be merely interested for the moment; if he think not of it afterwards, he will not be the better, but the worse for hearing. While on the other hand, if by divine grace he duly reflect on what he hears, he will become more alive to the power of truth, more softened under its impressions, and more influenced by it in his whole spirit, and character, and conduct.

But it is to be feared that Christians very little attend to this duty; many return home to their family and friends and enter on general conversation or reading, totally unconnected with what they have heard. Some take up a weekly journal to pass the time, and others a trifling book; and so in one way or other, all good thoughts are soon dissipated, and the sermon has, perhaps, hardly once after it was heard received a passing reflection. The time after hearing is a most critical moment, as it respects our salvation. The word may then become effectual to our eternal good. The seed has been sown; God is ready to give the blessing. O let us seek it; let us not by impertinent visits, by business, or pleasures, lose that invaluable blessing.

If you desire to be quickened in the Christian life, the mere sound of the minister's voice, or his most fervent discourses, however excellent, or pathetic, or eloquent, will

not do this. It must be permanently impressed on the heart by the blessed Spirit, through subsequent reflection. One sermon duly improved, will do more real good, than hundreds heard carelessly. Meditate in private on what you hear in public, if you would be quickened in the ways of the Lord.

We advise you after hearing, to make it your aim to RECOLLECT what you have heard. Some for this purpose take notes during the sermon and have found real benefit from it. Some, having found that taking notes has a tendency to divert the mind from self-application as the minister proceeds, write down when they return home the heads of the sermons, and the most important practical parts; this practice cannot fail to be useful. At any rate, enter not, if possible to avoid it, into worldly company and conversation immediately after the sermon. It is recorded of King Edward VI., that he took notes of the sermons which he heard. Why should you not find as much advantage in keeping memorandums of what you hear, for your spiritual benefit, as in the world, men do in making notes of various things, which they would otherwise forget, for their temporal advantage? The Apostle says, *Ye are saved, if ye keep in memory*, if ye hold fast; what I preached unto you. What an indescribably important “*if!*”. A forgotten Gospel saves not. See how St. James condemns the forgetful hearer. James i. 22—25.

Besides recollecting, MEDITATE upon the truths; ponder them, weigh them, and judge of their real value. Enter thus into their real excellence. We are told of the righteous, *His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night*. Weigh, then, by meditation the importance of what you have heard, and consider how far it relates to you, and how you may bring it into your daily practice. Without this, a multitude of sermons may be all in vain, and much instruction still unprofitable.

One sermon may drive out another, and not a doctrine be really believed and felt, not a precept obeyed. It is not merely the quantity of food which we take that makes our bodies strong, but the proper digestion of what we eat; and more suffer from too much than from too little food. And so with our souls, it is not merely the quantity of instruction which is given to us, that makes our souls strong; but the due consideration and self-application of what we are taught.

The Homily on the Scriptures expressively describes this duty—"Let us with fear and reverence lay up in the chest of our hearts these necessary and fruitful lessons; let us night and day muse, and have meditation and contemplation in them, let us ruminare, and, as it were; chew the cud, that we may have the sweet juice, spiritual effect, marrow, honey, kernel, taste, comfort, and consolation of them; let us stay, quiet, and certify our consciences with the most infallible certainty, truth, and perpetual assurance of them."

It would help to fix what we hear in our memory; if we were to CONVERSE with others, in a *practical* way, on what we have been hearing. Why should not the members of a pious family converse together on the truths which they hear, as worldly men do on those things which delight them? This would fix them in your minds; the beneficial recollection would continue, and each would be stirred up to excel in spiritual wisdom. There is need here to guard against a criticising of what has been heard, either in the way of admiration of man, of praise, or of censure, and applying it to others, and not to ourselves. Such conversation after sermons is as common as it is unprofitable. But if our hearts are really interested in godliness, we shall feel what we have heard; we shall exhort one another to attend to it; we shall provoke one another to love and good works; and thus we shall grow in spiritual wisdom, strengthening each

other's remembrance of what the minister has declared from the word of God, by our mutual recollection, and confirming it by other parts of that word. Was not David's conversation of this character? *We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company.* Ps. lv. 14. In some families there is a good practice for one member of the family to put in writing full heads of the sermon, and to let it be read before family prayer in the evening. Such a practice must greatly help the minister's labour and the hearer's profit. It must also be a benefit to those members of the family who were prevented from hearing. It has been observed, "If attendance on children, or other necessary occasions, cause us to keep our servants at home when others are busied in the service of the church, we should do our endeavours to supply the loss of public instruction, by our private admonitions, and by rehearsing at home those good directions which we received in the public ministry." With this should be joined, questioning the children of the family, and their being instructed in some catechism.*

VIEW THE SUBJECT BROUGHT BEFORE YOU WITH REFERENCE TO PRACTICE. Each doctrine or duty which may have been treated of in the sermon, should be practically considered as it affects your future conduct. Has the subject of the minister been the law of God in its purity, excellence, and extent? let it suggest these thoughts: I see how guilty I am; I feel that I cannot be justified by that law which I must acknowledge to be just and good; how great my ruin; how immense the necessity of a Redeemer and Sanctifier! Let

* Among the multitude of little works of the present day, in the catechetical form, it might be difficult and invidious to mention any in particular; the Church Catechism broken into short Questions; the Exposition published by the Bristol Church of England Tract Society; the Rev. W. Marsh's Catechism, and the useful Catechisms of the Rev. Basil Wood, and his Abridgement of Gastrell in the catechetical form with Dr. Watt's Catechisms and his Scripture History, will be familiar to our reader.

me go to him without delay for pardon and strength. Has the subject been our salvation by the death of Christ? let it be thus improved: O how evil is sin that required such sufferings from a Being so glorious; how great God's love; let me thankfully part with every thing that would hinder my obtaining an interest in so great a salvation! Has the subject been our fallen nature? let it lead you to think—O my miserable condition through sin! who can utter all the malignancy of sin; what an infinite mercy that I have not been left to perish in so great a ruin! but though I am fallen in Adam, there is a way of recovery in Christ. Has the subject been repentance? let it lead you to self-inquiry, whether you can discern in your own heart the marks of true repentance; let it show you how hard your heart is, that sorrows so little for your many sins, and how great the Saviour's grace that gives repentance! In this way practically apply to your own individual conduct the various truths delivered to you, that you may be really edified by what you hear.

Besides recollecting, meditating on, conversing about, and practically viewing the truths which you hear, REFER CONSTANTLY TO THE WORD OF GOD. The Bereans, as we have noticed in the preceding chapter, searched in private, whether the doctrine of the apostles accorded with the Scriptures: they did this *daily*, diligently studying and investigating the different testimonies of the word, just as a judge carefully goes through all the evidence that has been presented before him, omitting nothing that is material, that he may give a right judgment. Every faithful minister will rejoice to find his people thus searching the Scriptures for themselves.

Seek to improve yourself by PRIVATE STUDY. The time of hearing, though invaluable, is necessarily limited: and unless the advantages thus given us be improved by private study as well as reflection, we shall make but little

progress in divine knowledge. Though a poor man has not much time for reading, yet, in the long winter evenings, and on Sundays, he can generally get a little leisure; and though the Bible will ever be the pious poor man's favourite book, yet if he can procure them, he should read other books to inform his mind, and edify his heart.

But the most important work after all is, in retirement, and with all earnestness, to PRAY for the blessing of God. He, he only, *giveth the increase*. O let us honour his Spirit by looking for that aid, as the only efficient Improver of all we hear, the only Guide, Sanctifier, and Comforter of our souls. No regulations, however excellent, without the blessed Spirit's holy and heavenly grace, will do us any good. Satan does not fly from human words and resolutions. He is eager to take away the precious seed. Let us go to our closets then, let us kneel before God, let us earnestly, with uplifted hands, and all ardour of desire, spread the sermon which we have heard, and our insufficiency to obey, before him whose grace is sufficient. He will give *grace to help in time of need*. As the minister should go from his knees to the house of God, and return thither; so the people will find rich spiritual blessings from a similar course. It is the office of the Holy Spirit to bring to our remembrance the things which we have heard. John xiv. 26. Let the substance of the sermon be turned into prayer and intercession, and we shall receive the life giving influence of the Holy Spirit, making it the power of God to our salvation.

PRAYER AFTER HEARING.

O thou who art my reconciled Father in Christ Jesus, full of compassion and plenteous in mercy, who knowest my great weakness, and how soon temptations and trials, and the cares of the world, would hinder all real profit from thy word; I look up to thee, even to thee alone, to cause that which I have heard to be an abiding blessing to

my soul. May thy Holy Spirit write thy law in my heart, and cause me to walk in thy statutes and judgments. O give me a spiritual discernment of the truth, and incline my heart to practical obedience to it, so that I may not only be a hearer but a doer of the word. May I thus, by the fruits of a holy life, glorify thy name, and have it made manifest to my own conscience, that thou hast from the beginning chosen me to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth. This I ask in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

CHAP. VIII.

ON PRACTICAL OBEDIENCE TO THE WORD.

The truths of the Bible are not matters of speculation, or things of indifference: but, when cordially received, produce a striking change and a powerful effect. St. James calls the Scriptures, *The ingrafted word, which is able to save our souls*. This figure is very expressive. The shoot or slip, which is engrafted, is not of the proper growth of the tree, but is taken from another tree. A good shoot is put on a bad stock, and so changes the course of the juice to the strengthening a new plant, sweetening the sap which it receives from the stock, and making it a means of producing and bringing forth good fruit. Thus the word of Christ engrafted on our bad nature, becomes a shoot from which the fruits of righteousness are produced. It is a vital principle productive of spiritual life. Just as the graft inserted in the stock becomes a new means of bearing quite a new fruit on the stock on which it is grafted, so the word of God, when received into the heart of the believer, produces there the tempers and dispositions which are inculcated in that word, and form its true character. Your natural vigour and energy, your judgment and affection, all thus receive a right and fruitful direction. O that it might please God, Christian reader, that his divine truth may be so grafted in us, that all the fruit peculiar to the word may appear in our life. But it is, alas! too often found that the truths of God do not produce practical obedience. St James therefore gives the direction—*Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves*. James i. 22.

Who are they that are HEARERS ONLY? Some come from CUSTOM; they have been brought up in this good habit; their friends look for their attendance; their parents perhaps expect it from them if young, or their master or mistress requires it of them if servants; they would feel uneasy, even if they did not come: but still they may so come that nothing is farther from their mind, than the intention of hearing to have their conduct guided, or that they are really interested in what the minister says.

Others, who are hearers only, come to listen, hoping to HEAR SOMETHING NEW and extraordinary. They are desirous of entertainment, and of having something to talk about. They desire not edification and spiritual good.—Ezekiel gives a very striking picture of such (Ezek. xxxiii. 30;) *The children of thy people are still talking of thee by the walls, and in the doors of the houses, and speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying; Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the Lord. They went, but did not obey.*

Others MISTAKE THE MEANS FOR THE END. If they were to be asked, what it is to be religious, they would probably say—To hear sermons, attend prayers, receive the sacrament, and the like. No; a man may do all these things, and have no real religion at all. They are but means of promoting religion. Real religion is, to have a constant regard to the favour of God, our reconciled Father in Jesus Christ; and for his sake to abound in disinterested and self-denying acts of love, to those most needing our care; and to watch against, and keep ourselves from, the temptations and corruptions of a world lying in wickedness.—*Pure religion, and undefiled before God and the Father, is to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.* James i. 27.

Others hear FOR THE MIND, and not for the heart and life; they speculate, debate, reason, object, approve, judge—but

this is all. Mere knowledge of particular points of revealed truth, in an unsanctified heart, puffs a man up with pride, and keeps him at a distance from Christ and his salvation. It often happens that such *cannot endure the truth, but after their own lusts heap up to themselves teachers, having itching ears, and turn their ears from the truth, and are turned unto fables.* Tim. iv. 3, 4. On the contrary, there are those who hear merely for THE MOVING OF THE AFFECTIONS. Do not rest in mere emotions, in pleasurable feelings, instead of being carried on to real regeneration, and devotion of the whole life to God.

“Many persons attend public worship merely from A REGARD TO CHARACTER. They see the neighbourhood flocking to church: therefore they go thither. They perceive that orderly and respectable persons make a point of regular attendance, and they are not unwilling to embrace the the same method of being esteemed orderly and respectable. A man of this description has satisfied his wishes by showing himself in the church. When he listens to the sermon, it is without earnestness, and with many a secret wish that it were at an end. He relapses into some worldly train of thought, until he is aroused from a vacant reverie, or from meditation on his business, or pleasures, by the joyful sound of the congregation rising to depart.”

“Others SIT IN JUDGMENT upon a sermon. Swollen with spiritual pride, and deeming themselves masters of the most difficult points of doctrine, they scrutinize every sentence which drops from the lips of the preacher; put each of his words to the rack; examine the soundness of his orthodoxy with inquisitorial suspicion; and if they are able to fasten on an expression not precisely consonant with the niceties of their own religious phrasology, or capable of being understood in a sense somewhat at variance with their peculiar prepossessions, deny their instructor to be evangelical, pronounce him blind, and congratulate them-

selves on their own scriptural attainments and keen-eyed sagacity. Eager to censure, and impatient to decide; the fruit which they reap from the return of the Sabbath, is to be flattered in corruption and confirmed in ignorance."

St. James shows how it is that the Gospel has no effect on such; *If any man be a hearer of the word and not a doer he is like unto a man beholding his face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself and goeth his way, and straightway he forgetteth what manner of man he was.* Just as the mirror shows us what we are in our outward appearance, and discovers to us any spots, or any thing unbecoming which we could not otherwise discern, so divine truth discovers to us the exact state of our hearts, and all that sinfulness and corruption which there is within us. A person may look at himself in a glass, and not remove the defects which are thus discovered to him; but putting the glass away, entirely forget them: and so it is with such as are mere hearers. When the sermon is done, the mirror is put away by them. They have had a transient glimpse of their true state; but they have altered nothing that was wrong, they had no intention of rectifying any thing. When a man has persuaded himself that such hearing will save him, and goes on so, and ends so, how awful is the idea, that the very things on which he founded his hopes, will be his ruin; the very hearing in which he trusted, and boasted, will only rise up in judgment against him!

How then may we avoid these evils, and obtain that good which the word is intended to effect? The Apostle James, whose writings are remarkably practical, again assists us here. He says, *Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.*—James i. 25. Christian truth is a law of LIBERTY: it shows us the way of deliverance from the bondage of sin, and of access to spiritual freedom. It finds us in worse than

Egyptian bondage, guilty, enslaved, condemned, and ruined. It proclaims to us, through the merit of Christ, and the grace of his Spirit, pardon for our sins, and freedom from our slavery. It is PERFECT as, it reaches every case, embraces every circumstance, and nothing human can, or need be added to it, to render it more effectual. The blood of Christ alone cleanses from all sin, the righteousness of Christ alone justifies, the word of Christ is the only rule of life, the Spirit of Christ alone sanctifies. It is perfect, as it shows us man's only, and man's highest bliss, and that all interested in its saving blessing shall be kept by the power of God to the end, and shall enjoy after death an eternal felicity. It is a LAW, as it is a constitution of divine grace that will never be altered, the only authorised way that must be received and embraced, at the hazard, if we neglect it, of eternal ruin. Now the way to practical obedience is to LOOK INTO THIS LAW AND CONTINUE THEREIN, just as a person anxious to correct any deformity in his appearance, bends to the glass, and looks narrowly, and carefully, and removes what was unsightly, and adjusts what was disordered; so the obedient Christian carefully listens to the word, and searches the Scriptures to alter whatever may be wrong, and to regulate his whole life. It is not a transient glimpse, but he comes again and again, inspects himself by the mirror, and learns more and more of his true character, and to conform himself to that which is his real excellence. See how a female, vain of her person and dress, makes use of the mirror again and again. O were we as solicitous to have our souls adorned with righteousness and holiness, and, abiding in Christ and receiving his Spirit, did we look thus patiently and earnestly, again and again, into the divine mirror, our defects would be removed, and we should be adorned with the infinitely more valuable ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, and every other Christian grace.

Such a man is not *a forgetful hearer*, but *a doer of the work*. This DOING OF THE WORK, or, in other words, practical obedience, is the main promise of the new covenant, *I will put my laws into their minds, and write them in their hearts*. Heb. viii. 10. Jesus Christ is our perfect model and pattern; a pattern fully set before us in his word.—His people *hear his voice* and *follow* him; these ever go together: it is a vain thing to think of following Christ unless we hear his voice; and it is equally vain to pretend to hear his voice, if we are not seeking to tread in his steps. Christian reader! then let us gaze upon the Saviour, and narrowly inspect his character, and listen to his words, if we would attain a practical obedience. View him, as the painter does an original picture, and, as he wishes to copy all the beauties, and to transfer to his own canvass all the lovely tints, and glowing colours, and matchless form and graces, that distinguish the master painting, so let us endeavour to transfer to our heart, our conversation, and our life, all the lineaments of beauty which shine forth in him, that blessed Master, who is altogether lovely; his compassion, his patience and meekness, his unbounded charity, his unwearied love, his faith, his devotion, his boldness in re-proving sin, and his zeal for his Father's glory. Nor let the excellence of the model lead us to despair. Much may be attained for we have a mighty Helper. It is the office of the Holy Ghost, through the ministry of the word to make men *the epistles of Christ*, these epistles are *written, not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone but in fleshly tables of the heart*. 2 Cor. iii. 3. That sweet and gracious Advocate and Comforter comes with the word and inclines and assists, strengthens and consoles, *those who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit*.

CHAP. IX.

ANSWERS TO OBJECTIONS THAT MAY BE OFFERED AGAINST PRACTICAL OBEDIENCE.

There are few arguments against a religious life more plausible than this—If I attend, as the Bible requires, to my religious duties, MY WORLDLY INTERESTS WILL SUFFER—I shall displease the friends who are able and willing to assist me—or, I shall offend those on whom I am dependent—or, I shall lose opportunities of advancing myself in life. This objection might be met by my saying, You will not ordinarily in the result find this to be the fact. Have faith in God, and act a Christian part, whatever apparent loss it may bring; and you will find that *godliness hath the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.* But the whole force of this objection has been met by our Lord on the very ground of the worldly man. In these memorable words, our Lord fully answers one of the most plausible arguments that the world presents against religious duties, *What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul! or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul!*

Let a man have every possible earthly advantage, and no abatement from pain or loss, sickness or uncertainty; let him have all earthly wisdom, all strength, beauty, and riches, let him have universal dominion and universal admiration; let him have all these, with uninterrupted health and prosperity, and that for lengthened days, and let all these be *gained* by his own skill, wisdom, and industry.—No man ever had this; but allow the supposition, and give

every advantage that the worldly heart can desire, without any abatement on account of the ordinary disappointments and sorrows to which the most favoured of men are liable; allow only what must be allowed, that it is a temporal possession, that it is but for a limited season; and to an immortal spirit, as man is; all the glory is at once faded. In the eye of a sound judgment, it is all unsatisfying: it is but *vanity and vexation of spirit*. But this is not all the poverty and emptiness of such a choice. *The friendship of the world is enmity with God*. There is a tremendous loss connected with the gain of the world by the neglect of religion, even the loss of the soul. If it was merely a temporal life that was to be lost—suppose, for instance, a man were to have the best advantages of this world for a single hour, on the understood condition, that at the end of that hour he was to be capitally executed; what man in his senses would take the temporary good with such a condition? Observe the sailor in the tempest; he will cast over the cargo, he will cut down the masts, he will throw away even the provisions, he will spare nothing to escape death, and to save his temporal life for a few short surviving years, it may be, full of trial and sorrow; how much more then may the Christian part with every thing to escape the loss of the soul, and to secure eternal life, through countless ages of never-ending joy and happiness! When we fear our worldly interests will suffer, let us realize the thought of the soul's immortality. It not only lives in the body, but when the body sinks into the dust, the soul lives, thinks, and feels; is capable of sorrows and joys; yes, of eternal sorrows; or eternal joys. Think then what it is to lose the soul—to be for ever miserable—for ever in despair and anguish, after this temporal life is ended! No other evil can be imagined so tremendous.

In the fear of such a danger, where is the objection which we have noticed? The very ground of that objec-

tion, that your interests will suffer, is the very reason why you should attend to the Gospel; your very fear that you shall displease your friends, who can help you, should, on every principle of sound reason, lead you to repent and turn to God, that you may secure the favour of the most wise, kind, and powerful of all friends; the very loss of temporal good which you dread, should only lead you to give all diligence to escape eternal loss, and to obtain eternal life.

We have reasoned, hitherto, on the idea that you would gain the whole world by neglecting religion; but do not many disregard the Gospel for the most trivial gain, or the most worthless indulgence? O, when it comes at the last to be seen for what it was that men parted with their souls, how weak and absurd will the conduct of the wicked be found to have been! One was afraid of hurting the feelings of his companion; another loved his present ease; and another wished to add a few pounds to his property. One, for an oath that gave him no worldly profit; another, for a lie that brought him no real advantage; another, for sensual gratification; another, for sabbath breaking which gave him even no present happiness, parted with an eternal inheritance, everlasting life, the crown of glory, and the bliss of heaven, and bought the condemnation of God, the misery of never-ending despair, and the torments of hell. O let the sinner talk no more of his worldly interests suffering by religion. Every interest for time and eternity suffers by irreligion.

Another objection commonly made against a practical obedience to the word is this—I CANNOT ATTEND TO IT AT THE PRESENT TIME. Just now, I am very busy, I have many other things to think of, and it would be so unseasonable, that I cannot now think of religion; a time will come when I may have more leisure. The answer to all the solemn truths heard is, *Go thy way for this time; when I have a*

convenient season, I will call for thee. But you forget that the present is the only season you really have—*now is the accepted time.* Can you insure a future time? you cannot! Can you be certain that if you neglect your eternal interests now, God will hereafter give you his grace? Oh, no! you forget that if the soul be lost, it is an irremediable loss; there is no future ransom. By nature you will never have any other feeling than your present feeling of procrastination and delay; and if you trifle with God's present message of mercy, under such a pretext, you make his very mercy, the reason for insulting him the more. Will it not be just then, if he never sends again to you, or never again gives you the disposition to close with his gracious invitations?

But it is again objected, I shall be ACCOUNTED FOOLISH, AND INCUR SOME ODISIOUS NAME. Allow this in its fullest extent; but will you be really foolish to escape merely the *imputation* of folly! *The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil, is understanding.* Job xxviii. 28.—The world is ready indeed to think that they mainly are guilty of folly who are in earnest in religion. But one would think, when the case was plainly stated, that no one could hesitate in admitting the extreme folly of neglecting eternal bliss. O be not afraid of the reproach of man.—All the servants of God now in glory have endured it.

Others object, I HATE HYPOCRISY; MANY THAT PROFESS RELIGION ARE HYPOCRITES. You do right to hate hypocrisy; our Lord pronounces a woe upon all hypocrites. But what if, in your present state, you yourself are a hypocrite? you profess to be a Christian, and yet live to the world; that is hypocrisy. You profess to think real religion of value, and yet for fear of hypocrisy, disguise and conceal your attachment to it; that is real hypocrisy. O, look higher than man: God's eye is upon you. He sees through all your littleness. He detects all your sophistry. O bring

no more vain excuses. Seek his favour. The hypocrisy of others only renders it the more needful that you should be sincere.

Somewhat like this, is another objection, **THE MULTITUDE ARE LIKELY TO BE RIGHT: MEN IN GENERAL THINK AND LIVE DIFFERENTLY.** Why then did our Lord say, *Wide is the gate and broad is the road that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that go in thereat; and, Strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it!* Why did his Apostles declare, *Love not the world; if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord.* Let these plain declarations speak for themselves. Remember the positive precept, *Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil.* Dare to be singular for God, and he will carry you through all difficulties, to your comfort and honour here, and to your eternal reward hereafter. O recollect, that if the whole world condemn you, this will not be a reason why you should be condemned of God; if the whole world approve you, it does not make you stand one whit better in his sight who is your final and supreme Judge.— *It is a very small matter to be judged of man's judgment; he that judgeth us is the Lord.* But while men of the world bring their objections against a religious course, let me bring one against continuing in a worldly course, contrary to the checks of conscience. **WHAT IF YOUR HEART SHOULD THEREBY BECOME HARDENED,** and repentance become impracticable! No sermon is heard in vain; it either hardens or softens; it is either a *savour of death unto death, or a savour of life unto life.* Perhaps nothing hardens more than a mere external attendance on ordinances. To hear threatenings against sin, time after time, and yet continue those sins; and to hear, again and again, of the love of Christ, and yet remain unmoved by that love, sears the conscience

and deadens the soul. If you hear not to-day, your heart will to-morrow be more hard and indisposed to hear.

If you would avoid such a woe, continue not a worldly course against the checks of your own convictions ; cultivate a tender conscience. Grieve not the Spirit of God.— That blessed Spirit will make you wise unto salvation!

CHAP. X.

THE DANGER OF NEGLECTING DIVINE TRUTH.

The danger will appear more clearly from considering, first, the excellence of the salvation proposed to us. We will, then, notice the sin and danger of disregarding it.— Consider a little the greatness of the salvation proposed.

FROM WHAT A MISERY IT RESCUES US! All men are transgressors of the divine law. The great Creator, the King eternal, is justly offended with us. He who is truth itself, has even declared that transgressors *shall go away into everlasting punishment, prepared for the devil and his angels.*— Consider, then, our true state! Look at the infinite holiness, the inviolable truth, the almighty power, and the un-deviating justice, of God! See how his righteous law condemns every human being! Who shall stand before him when he is angry! If God is our enemy, every other being is armed against us, and we are defenceless in a world of enemies. Who could rescue man, and preserve God's honour and justice untarnished? Let sinners be pardoned and saved, and what shall become of the justice and holiness, the power and veracity of God, all of which are engaged to see a meet recompense of reward rendered to every transgression? To be under the vengeance of divine justice, the terror of Almighty wrath, the sentence of eternal punishment, and all so merited, and every mouth shall be stopped! only consider your real condition, your tremendous danger: and then you will see the greatness of that salvation by which you may be rescued from it.

IN WHAT A MARVELLOUS WAY IT WAS ACCOMPLISHED! It occupied the council and purpose of God himself before the world began. Eph. i. 4; 2 Tim. i. 9. It was foretold of God, and expected by prophets and righteous men for four thousand years. It was announced by angels from heaven. The only Son of God, *the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person*, adopts the astounding humiliation of taking upon him our nature, and at length dying the death of the cross, to accomplish this salvation. The Holy Spirit concurs in carrying on the glorious purpose, conveying and applying to each individual the mighty blessing. When the sacred writers speak of this salvation, they describe it as being great and marvellous, the wisdom of God, his manifold wisdom, and all the treasures of wisdom.

WHAT BLESSINGS ARE IMPARTED THROUGH IT, EVEN IN THIS WORLD! There is treasured up in Christ Jesus, the Fountain-Head of this salvation, a rich supply for all their wants. Through him we have the gift of the Holy Spirit, of regeneration, repentance, faith, and holiness. Then there is pardon and righteousness, justification and peace with God, a hope full of immortality, full of joy. This salvation shows us, even here, God our Father, our Friend, and our Portion; Christ our Redeemer, our Shepherd, and our Saviour; the Holy Spirit our Sanctifier and our Comforter: the blessed angels our ministering attendants; Satan vanquished, the world overcome, and the kingdom of heaven opened to all believers. Consider how freely the blessings are bestowed—*by grace—not of works*. Eph. ii. 8. Consider how extensively they are proposed—*whosoever will*; Rev. xxii.; how fully they meet all our wants! Connect all this with our desert of eternal wrath, and see the supreme magnitude of this salvation!

And TO WHAT A HEIGHT OF GLORY DOES IT ULTIMATELY ADVANCE US! It is called *an exceeding and eternal weight of*

glory. O Christian reader! when we hear Christ sentence the wicked to eternal wrath, when we see them sink into everlasting ruin; when we view the righteous about to enter the mansions of bliss; when, if this wondrous mercy has saved us; we ourselves join that blessed company, rise to that inconceivable glory, and bask in the bliss of that Divine Being in whose presence is fulness of joy: then we shall better understand the unspeakable greatness of this salvation. It brings in its final result perfect felicity, of endless duration and unchangeable security. So inexpressibly great is it, that all comparisons fail, and there is nothing that can fully illustrate its infinite excellence. Thus the Scriptures describe it;—*God so loved the world;—so great a salvation—Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.* Yet great as this salvation is, a vast proportion do practically neglect it. There are millions within the limits of Christendom, nay within the sound of Sabbath bells, who never heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ. “They live to manhood, and to old age, deplorably ignorant of the way of salvation, and in ignorance, too, not the less deplorable than it is wilful. It is this which so fearfully aggravates their guilt, that, on the very confines of light, they remain in darkness; and therefore prove that it is a darkness which they love, and in which they persist.—Thus it will be found more tolerable for the heathen world abroad, than the heathen world at home.” O how true it is of us as a nation—*Neither have we obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in his laws which HE set before us, by his servants the prophets.*

The danger incurred by disregarding this salvation, is neither slight nor trifling. The Apostle asks, *How shall we escape if we neglect it?* His question is vehemently negative. It expresses the absolute impossibility of escaping the divine wrath. A man may escape blame from his fel-

low-creatures; but what will all this avail! he is not to be judged at last by man, but by the all-wise and almighty Jehovah. Who can escape from Him? what time can take you out of the reach of Him who ever liveth? What place can hide you from Him who is every-where alike present? what subtilty can conceal aught from Him who knows every thought?

THE GUILT OF THOSE WHO NEGLECT SALVATION IS IMMENSE! It was a great sin in the Jews to disobey the voice of God spoken by Moses. It was a still greater sin in a subsequent generation, after the example and punishment of their forefathers, to despise and misuse the prophets. It was a still farther aggravation of iniquity, when the nation had been carried into captivity for refusing to hear the prophets, to reject the chief Prophet, our Lord Jesus Christ, and his Apostles. They filled up *the measure of their fathers . . . so that* our Lord said to them, *upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth.* They sinned, after all the warnings of so many generations: *If I had not come,* says our Lord again, *they had not had sin* (not to that extent,) *but now they have no cloak for their sin.* O Christian reader! how tremendously accumulated is the guilt of those, in these last days, who, after the experience of so many ages, and with such a cloud of witnesses, still neglect so great a salvation!

THEIR RUIN SHALL BE SUDDEN AND IRRETRIEVABLE! *How shall they escape?* the expression intimates that the day of wrath will be to the wicked both unexpected and inevitable. They would gladly fly away, but flight from the Divine Presence is vain and impossible. They would gladly hide themselves in the lowest depths, and be covered by hills and mountains, but still God is there. That omnipresence which is the highest joy of his servants, is the sum of all terror to his enemies. God has declared that *it shall come to pass that every soul which will not hear his Son shall be destroyed*

from among the people. Acts iii. 23. God has made known his final purpose:—*They refused to hear my words; therefore, behold, I will bring evil upon them which they shall not be able to escape.* Jer. xi. 10, 11. In what refuge can they trust? Will ungodly companions help them? no: they equally need help. Will Satan's power shield them? they preferred his service; will he protect them? no: he is in himself punished; he shares the curse, and, as far as joy can enter his malignant heart, he rejoices in their ruin. Can the holy angels or any of the saints assist? no: they can do, they choose to do, nothing but what God approves. Do they now look to Christ? O grievous ruin! it is too late! Their once neglected Saviour is now their righteous Judge. They despised his salvation, and loved sinful pleasures better than Him who died for them. The neglected Gospel furnishes another aggravation of their ruin:

THEY WILL BE CONDEMNED AT THE FINAL JUDGMENT. In the day of trial, *God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing.* How shall they escape! What plea can they urge, when the pure and holy law of God, in all its reasonableness, and their daily violations of that law, are set before them? To the righteous, the day, of judgment is a day of great joy. 1 Thess. iv. 13—18. Those that are justified by faith in Christ, and love him and his people, shall not hear of one sin (Jer. i. 20; Micah vi. 19; Heb. viii. 12;) but they shall hear of all the good which they did, and had forgotten. Matt. xxv. But God will enter into judgment with the wicked. They are under that awful saying of Christ, *Whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for them.*—Matt. x. 14, 15. O how vain must be every plea, when they have disregarded the wisdom of God, set before them in redemption by Jesus Christ; they are speechless before

him; and they hear the tremendous words, *Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels!*

They SHALL ENDURE ETERNAL WRATH! It is an awful question put by our Lord, *How can ye escape the damnation of hell?* Who can reverse the terrible sentence? When once it is passed, it is irreversible. It is justly merited. They were told of their danger. They heard that it was so great a danger, that the Son of God himself came down from heaven to avert it, and yet they carelessly slept, or rashly squandered away the precious hours of life in which they might have obtained it, and procrastinated, day after day, month after month, and year after year, when they should have fled from the wrath to come. They slighted years of probation, and every warning which God gave, and now Satan, with malignant triumph, takes them as his perpetual prey, his lawful captives, and they enter, never to leave, that dread abode *where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched!* These are not mere fancied dangers. They are to the neglecters of salvation, awful and swiftly-approaching realities. *God is not a man that he should lie, neither the son of man that he should repent; hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall it not come to pass?—* O careless hearers, pity yourselves! Consider your latter end.

The danger of neglecting this salvation may be more specially shown from the solemn truth that the PRESENT MOMENT IS THE ONLY OPPORTUNITY FOR EMBRACING IT, that we can call our own, and the grace of God being wholly beyond our control, if we now neglect this grace, it may never again be afforded us.* The Scriptures frequently dwell on

* Mr. Gisborne makes the following awakening observation on the importance of attention to each sermon that we hear. "To how many sinners has an individual sermon been made as it were the hinge of conversion, the turning point between life and death! Did you withhold your attention from the last sermon at which you were present? how know you but in that sermon was contained an elucidation of some im-

there being but a limited period for hearing the word. David says (Psal. xcv. 7.), *To-day if ye will hear his voice.*—The Apostle (Heb. iii. 12—14) lays much stress on this expression. Isaiah says, *Seek the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.* If prophets and apostles thus urge us to use the present time, and our Saviour himself pathetically and deeply sighs over Jerusalem, *If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong to thy peace!* surely it must be a thing of infinite danger to neglect so great salvation for a single day, or a single hour. O the danger of delay and procrastination! It is the grand device of Satan to keep our souls from a present attention to our salvation. Most men think of being religious at some time or other; but they stifle their convictions, defer the work, and so are lost. To-day is the whole of time that you can call your own. O reader, think of that word, TO-DAY! Well may we be in earnest with you; Satan, and the flesh, and the world, plead hard against Christ, and against you. They all say, TOMORROW. No! to-morrow will not do; for God says TO-DAY. Begin this very day to hear, believe and obey his voice—There will always be difficulties. Those difficulties will increase, and not diminish. You never can, you never will in your whole life, have a more suitable season for breaking through all obstacles, and giving yourself up to God, than the present moment. To-day, God calls you; to-day he sets before you the riches of his grace, a free reconciliation, full pardon, the gift of his Spirit, and the sure hope of everlasting life. Before you refuse, before you delay, before you trifle with and neglect so great a salvation, think

portant doctrine which you misconceive; a scriptural example of virtue most needful to your edification; a scriptural denunciation of vengeance against your own besetting sin! How know you but that to the absence of the Christian armour which that discourse would have supplied, your fall under recent temptations is to be attributed? How know you but from the absence of that armour, temptations, even now impending over your head, will derive their peculiar strength?"

what may be on the morrow. If you reject his offer, to-morrow may be too late. God may be silent—his grace may no longer be set before you,—his Gospel no more sound in your ears; you may be given up to a hardened heart; you may be doomed to eternal perdition. May we receive from above that power of the Holy Spirit which may enlighten our understanding; and preserve us from a doom so earnestly to be deprecated, so deeply to be deplored! For, after all, what can mere reasoning avail? O blessed Spirit! thou alone canst convert and edify.

O Holy Ghost! into our minds,
 Send down thy heavenly light;
 Kindle our hearts with fervent zeal,
 To serve God day and night.—*Ordination Service.*

CHAP. XI.

THE BLESSED RESULT OF FAITHFUL HEARING.

The faithful hearer is truly blessed. HIS KNOWLEDGE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT TRUTHS IS ENLARGED: Experience shows that by a humble, faithful, and regular attendance on the ministry of the word, with a spirit of prayer for God's blessing, knowledge of divine things is given from above.—Every sermon may be the means of your increasing in heavenly wisdom. It is in this view that Solomon says, *Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not. Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gate, waiting at the posts of my doors; for whoso findeth me, findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord.* A little knowledge, where it is gracious and saving, has a blessedness above all calculation. At the time our Lord pronounced the Apostles blessed, (Matt. xiii. 16,) they knew very little, but they were under his teaching; he explained his doctrine to them more fully; and, by degrees, they came to *the riches of the full assurance of understanding.*

Hereby WE KNOW THAT GOD HAS CALLED US OUT OF THE WORLD, TO PARTAKE OF THE BLESSINGS OF THE GOSPEL. St. Paul says, *Whom he did predestinate, them he also called.* Rom. viii. 30. This is an inestimable privilege. By the preaching of the Gospel we are called out from a world lying in wickedness, from the service of sin and Satan, to follow the Saviour and obtain his glory. 2 Thess. ii. 14. In this *heavenly calling*, (Heb. iii. 1,) we are invited by the Father of all mercies freely to partake of all spiritual blessings. Are we doubtful whether we are included? How can we

doubt, when the last lingering words of his own book again repeat the oft-reiterated (Isa. lv. 1; John vii. 37) invitation, *Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.*—Rev. xxii. 17. Do you feel so pressed and weighed down with sin, that you think you cannot be included? you are the very persons especially invited: *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*—Matt. xi. 28. Do you yet hesitate? ministers are sent on purpose to entreat you.—*We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled.* . 2 Cor. v. 20. Are you still full of fears that you MAY not believe? nay, rather fear, lest you SHOULD NOT OBEY his commands; for *this is his commandment that ye should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.* 1 John iii. 23. Rather fear lest you incur his final wrath by unbelief: *He that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.* John iii. 36. As God calls all that hear the Gospel by the outward preaching, so he inwardly, by the teaching and internal calling of his blessed Spirit, given with the outward word, disposes his people to attend to his word, to become partakers of his blessing, and to have fellowship with his Son. 1 Cor. i. 9; 1 Thess. i. 5.

CONVICTION OF SIN FOLLOWS A RIGHT HEARING OF THE WORD. We shall thus be led to acknowledge the perfection of the law of God, and the wretchedness and insolvency of man and be truly humbled and contrite before God. This is the special work of the Holy Spirit through hearing.—Acts ii. 37. This important effect of the instruction of ministers is independent of their endeavours. There is this unavoidable defect in the teaching of ministers, that they cannot answer as to the result in particular cases.—But the Spirit of God, through them, does much more. He not only presents in the word the truths which he designs to teach, but he also opens the heart to receive them;—*The*

Lord opened Lydia's heart that she attended to the things which were spoken of Paul. But though repentance and conviction of sin are thus the work of the Spirit, yet the preacher is the chief means which the Spirit uses; and of the word He declares, *It shall accomplish that which I please and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.*

Another blessed result of hearing aright is, that IT IS GOD'S METHOD OF IMPARTING FAITH TO HIS PEOPLE. Faith is undoubtedly God's gift, (John vi. 44; Matt. xvi. 17; Phil. i. 29;) but the way in which it pleases him that it should BEGIN, is by hearing the truth. Rom. x. 17. We look in vain for faith among those who know not divine truth, and never hear the word of God. But Paul describes the faith of Christians as following hearing the word of truth. Eph. i. 13. Faith springs from the word, as the living plant from the root, and as the rays from the Sun. It is impossible for any one to become a believer in Christ, but through some part of revealed truth made known to him. THE PROGRESS of faith proceeds in the same way from hearing. At first we are *weak in faith*, like little children, but the word is as *milk* to the young (1 Cor. iii. 1, 2. and as *meat* to the strong men (Heb. v. 14,) by which both are nourished and strengthened. And the PERFECTING of faith is connected also with the ministry of the word. St. Paul shows that ministers are appointed for this end, even *the perfecting of the saints*. Eph. iv. 11—13. Right hearing of the word nourishes till it perfects faith. It will be found true, in general experience, that in proportion as the whole truths of God are clearly brought before the minds of men by the public ministry of the word, and as they faithfully and constantly attend it, so true Christian faith, with all its blessed effects, will spread and increase.

Hereby OUR JUSTIFICATION IS CONFIRMED. It is true that we are *justified freely by the grace of God, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*. Rom. iii. 24. But how do

I receive the blessing? by faith What is the warrant of that faith? the word of God. How are we to obtain that faith? by hearing. How is that faith proved to be genuine? by its conforming the soul to the word, and producing corresponding fruits in the life. *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.* John x. 27. When we hear Christ's voice and follow him, then we may be sure that he knows us, and that we are his sheep, and among his justified people, *Whom he called, them he also justified.*

HEREBY OUR ADOPTION IS CERTIFIED. God gives to his people the spirit of adoption; *the power*, the right or privilege, *to become the sons of God.* John i. 12: This is given to those *that believe on the name of his Son.* When Christ is preached, and I hear, and, through the Spirit, accept the offer of mercy in Christ, I become a child of God, and am reckoned in that family of which it is said; *As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again, to fear; but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.* Rom. viii. 14—17. By nature men are servants of sin, and under its tyrannical bondage; but the receiving of the truth breaks the chains, and admits them to *the glorious liberty of the children of God.* Rom. viii. 21. Our Lord says, *Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.* John viii. 32. Who can tell the blessedness of looking up to God with filial confidence and love as our Father?

HEREBY OUR ELECTION IS SECURED. We are charged, *Give diligence to make your calling and election sure.* 2 Pet., i. 10. By diligently attending the means of grace, we obtain divine strength enabling us to be holy and to glorify God, and thus have a sweet assurance given that we are *chosen in Christ.* Eph. i. 4. And what love is here! that God should

from his own good pleasure, before time began, have planned salvation, and purposed, to the glory of his own grace, and the praise of his name, to save us from sin, make us holy, and bring us to his kingdom: I say, this is such a display of divine mercy and love, as, if once reasonably made out from the word of God, and the work of his Spirit on the heart, cannot but fill us with love, and gratitude, and assured hope, and the most joyful anticipations of future glory, and deeply humble our souls in the conviction that all we are and have is of sovereign grace and love. Latimer says, "Whosoever heareth the word of God and followeth it, the same is elect by him. And again, whosoever refuseth to hear the word of God and follow the same, is damned. So that our election is sure if we follow the word of God."

Hereby GOD CARRIES ON OUR SANCTIFICATION. All Christian graces are nourished and strengthened by a due regard to Christ's word. We have seen, that regeneration and faith are thus given, and all holiness is thus advanced in us. Our Lord prays to his Father for his disciples: *Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.* John xvii. 17.—They who are most eminent for holiness, are among those who are at the same time the most constant and diligent in attending the ministry of the Gospel. Christian reader! we appeal to you, how often has your heart, when dull and lifeless, hereby been stirred up and quickened! How often have holy resolutions been thus first excited in your mind! How certainly all your religion would, humanly speaking, have died, had it not been for the quickening and new-reviving power of the Gospel!

THE SPIRITUAL COMFORT OF THE BELIEVER IS MAINTAINED AND ADVANCED. The Gospel is the dispensation of the Holy Ghost, the Comforter. It is *good tidings of great joy.* The office of ministers is to comfort the people of Christ; as well as to awaken the careless. And O what full and

abounding comfort there is to the tried; afflicted and burdened Christian, in the rich promises of a free pardon, and full and gratuitous justification by Christ, the gift of the Holy Ghost, and the new covenant *well ordered in all things and sure!* Have you never gone to the house of God weary, disquieted, and sorrowful, and there heard a word in season, and returned calm, and peaceful, and happy?— This has been the precious experience of the servants of God. David says, *Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound; they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance.* To taste the love of Christ to us, and to feel emotions of strongest love to Him, this is heaven begun below.

OUR SOULS ARE RIPENING FOR THE GLORY TO COME. Not merely temporal benefits, but a preparation for eternal, is connected with a due regard to Christ's word. Our Lord asserts, *He that heareth my words and believeth in me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death to life.* This is the road in which the saints that now fill the heavenly mansions once walked.— They heard, and listened to, and loved the truth of God.— They tasted its sweetness, they experienced its power, they lived under its influence. St. Peter says, *Desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.* 1 Pet. ii. 2. Would you attain the glory above! tread in the steps of saints below, and thus be *followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*

And what are the happy results of faithful hearing, as they regard ETERNAL LIFE? Let us look at it only in one point—the perfect knowledge of God which we shall there attain. Now under the clearest discourses of the ministry, and the fullest privileges of the Gospel, *we see through a glass darkly, but then, face to face: now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known.* There is a veil of flesh between us and the world of spirits; there is a bo-

dy of sin and death that intercepts our view, and obscures our prospect, and hinders our full knowledge. True it is, we have the cheering light of God's holy word (an inestimable advantage,) *a light to our feet, and a lamp to our paths,* to guide us safe in the way to heaven. Christians are like men travelling along a high road in the night, with a sufficient light in their hands to guide them through to their home; but they can see little or nothing of the beauties and glories of the country through which they pass; the most splendid landscape may be spread before them; the hills, and dales, and rivers, and woods, may enrich the scene with diversified beauty; the most curious and delicate plants and flowers may adorn the whole, and yet the pilgrim be either unconscious of it, or unable to discern it. But, by and by, the night will pass away, the morning of the resurrection will come, and then, O then, what tongue can tell the enraptured emotions of the faithful servant of Christ, discovering infinite beauties, where he was ready to think all was gloom and dreariness; magnificence and glory bursting on his ravished sight, beyond all his conceptions! What heart can imagine the blessed result which will succeed to our now walking by faith; when the veil is removed, and the glorious light of life shines upon us, and we behold that heavenly country, of which it is said, *There shall be no night there, and they need no candle, neither light of the sun: for the Lord God giveth them light, and they shall reign for ever and ever!* O happy day! Happy people that *walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance!* O happy result of faithful hearing! Let us seek this happiness, as the one great object of our worthy and incessant pursuit.

Are you desirous of this happiness, yet utterly uncertain about your interest in it? Have you examined yourself, and still are unable to discover what is your character? or, rather, fearful that you are among the unfaithful hearers of the word? Well, suppose it be so, as with vast multi-

tudes it is; what is your present duty, and your first interest? Fly on the wings of faith to the Saviour. Exercise present acts of faith in him. Regard his great, and full, and free salvation. Cast yourself, guilty and vile as you truly judge yourself to be, on his ample merits; and it may be in the very exercise of faith you may discover not only that *he that believed shall be saved*, but that you do really believe, and are among the saved. You may receive from that blessed Saviour, the large gift of the Holy Ghost and so may be filled with love, joy, and peace, break through all the trammels of sin and Satan, triumph, over the world, live here to the praise and glory of God, and the good of man, and finally join the spirits of just men made perfect above, to inherit with them the full enjoyment of their praises, and their participation of the divine glory through eternity.

CHAP. XII.

ADDRESS TO DIFFERENT CLASSES, EXHORTING THEM TO ATTEND TO THIS DUTY.

Though the danger of neglecting the word be so great, and the blessed result of attending to it so unspeakably important, yet the great mass of professing Christians in a Christian land do neglect to hear, or hear very irregularly. We would close then this Treatise, by earnestly addressing all such persons.

Are you IN EXTENSIVE BUSINESS, or in an important station? O, without the divine blessing, what good will you derive from prosperity? You may perhaps come to me rolling in wealth; but now care and anxiety rob you of repose; disease will soon follow—death is at hand—and what will be the end, when your soul shall be required of you? Do you ask, What shall I do? moderate your earthly desires: attend to something higher, and more really profitable—your spiritual, your eternal good; make it your main concern to *fear God and keep his commandments*; here is your first business and true bliss. Do you call this folly and enthusiasm. Hearken, men of mere business! you are enthusiasts; you are extravagant; you are imprudent; your schemes are trifling; your speculations fanciful and delusive! No, you reply; we lay our plans wisely and cautiously; we have long experience; they are sure to succeed. Be it so. Let them succeed; still the charge is true; your great business is overlooked; your chief interest is neglected: your main chance is still in hazard: you are wise for a day, but are you not fools for endless days? you gain

a child's rattle; you lose an angel's inheritance; you escape an earthly bankruptcy; you are plunging headlong to a bankruptcy which will ruin you for ever. Do I exceed? no, the figures fall short, infinitely short, of the tremendous reality.

Are you PARENTS? And will you set your children a pattern of disobedience to the best of Parents? How can you ask them to obey you, when you disobey Him! You wish for the good of your children; you desire to make them happy, and possibly, in order to promote this, you spend the Sabbath in idle parties of pleasure. What are your feelings at the close of such a Sabbath? After a day so spent, are you not wearied and dissatisfied? So far from being refreshed for the duties of another week, you are unfitted for them. There is infinitely more vexation in misspending the Sabbath, than in any mortification of our carnal pleasures by following its holy employments. Give the day to its sacred duties; bring your children to hear, and let the word of Christ reign in your heart and family, and it will spread a heavenly influence around you; you will be invigorated and quickened for all your daily labors.

Are you CHILDREN? begin early to love and reverence the word of God. Be attentive to what is said by his ministers. Try to remember the text of the sermon which you hear. Ask your parents to explain what you do not understand. Think of young Samuel; while he was *a little child*, he *ministered unto* the Lord, when *the word of the Lord was precious*. He *watched in the temple of the Lord*; and God called him to be a prophet, and used him as an instrument of extensive good. My little children, love to hear like Samuel, who said, when God called him, *Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth*. Young as you are, you should consider yourselves servants of God, you should hear what he speaks, and hear in order to obey. Think of the children who sang Hosannahs in the temple; and of Jesus

himself, who at twelve years of age was found in the midst of the doctors, both hearing and asking them questions.— Pray you for God's blessing, as that child did of whom it is said that she never entered the house of God without secretly offering up this petition, "Lord, help me to remember something!"

Are you IN INFERIOR SITUATIONS—Clerks, apprentices, or engaged in manufactories in large cities or towns, or in laborious situations, where you are confined during the week to a close and constant employment? possibly you think yourselves at liberty to neglect hearing on the Sunday, and to spend it in public walks and mere recreations. We allow that the inducements are very strong to neglect the less agreeable privilege, of hearing the sacred word; and to pursue, without restraint, the delightful recreation afforded to one who has been shut up all the week, by the view of the simple scenery of nature, and the refreshing breezes of a pure air. Probably you have no quiet and retired places where you could take a solitary walk to meditate in the intervals of immediate Sabbath duties. Probably the necessities of your family allow you no other day for such an enjoyment. Probably your earthly master would not, or could not, allow you time for such a refreshment. You think it right to obey him, lest your temporal interests should suffer. But—would you think it an act of extreme folly, and call it a wasteful idleness, to be giving the day to wandering among the fields, when your earthly master, or your family, call you to work, and have you not a heavenly Master, and have you not spiritual necessities? God has issued his command—*Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy!* Will you disregard it! God gives his wages: will you undervalue them? *If thou turn away thy foot from doing thy pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable, and shalt honour him not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor*

speaking thine own words, then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord. Christians! pure and delightful as are the joys of contemplating the beauties of nature, there are much higher joys, even in this world! O, to have our sins washed away in the blood of Christ, and to be justified freely by his grace, to be renewed by his Holy Spirit, and to become a child of God, this is true happiness on earth! And there are before you yet higher joys still in the paradise above. May the blessed Spirit of Christ give us a taste for these: let us not forfeit these for any mere temporary indulgences. Our life is now a life of faith, and not of sense; be not surprised therefore if you have to give up some temporal pleasures: those which are innocent shall be enjoyed with a double relish, from being enjoyed without neglect of our first duties. In any case the time is hastening on, when we shall *enter the joy of our Lord, even fulness of joy.* But will you still say—Surely we may have Sunday for a day of pleasure? By all means let Sunday be a day of pleasure: but what is your pleasure? Is it idle conversation, feasting, and light and vain company? O these are not real pleasures! they are very unsatisfactory and transitory gleams of false pleasure. *Delight thyself in the Lord,* there is the true happiness of the immortal spirit. Hear and read his word—that tells the labourer of satisfying joy, *of the rest which remaineth for the people of God;* there you have set before you that which will afford you comfort and happiness in all your toils and sorrows. It is specially needful that you should hear, and thus learn divine truth when you can, for you have not time nor opportunity for much study, and deep learning; and therefore you should avail yourself of those advantages with which you are now favoured. In a Christian country you have, through a kind Providence, ministers appointed to instruct you, whose special office it is to acquire divine knowledge for your edification. By due attention, joined to

your own reading of God's word, you will increase in *the knowledge of the Son of God, till you come to a perfect man unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.* Be not, by neglect of such instruction, unhappy in both worlds. Hear, believe, and obey; and so shall you be blessed here and for ever.

Are you SERVANTS? you should not neglect to hear. Shut not yourselves out from so great a privilege, where you have permission to attend, and remain not in any family where you are excluded from hearing God's word. You have souls as precious as those of the highest monarch.—You must be happy or miserable, and that for ever. The truths which you hear, received in a believing heart, will sweeten the bitterest service, smooth the most rugged path, and infinitely heighthen the comfort of the happiest condition. Blessed is the portion of one, whom no outward circumstances can separate from the Father's love, the Saviour's redemption, the Holy Spirit's guidance, and the sure prospect of an eternal glory yet to be revealed and fully enjoyed. To every human being we say—Neglect to hear and you fall under the sentence of destruction (Acts iii. 23;) *hear and your souls shall live.* Isa. lv. 3. We set before you life and death! choose you this day. Be wise for eternity. O neglect not so great salvation.

We conclude all with the words of our Lord,

HE THAT HATH EARS TO HEAR, LET HIM HEAR.