

## DIRECTION TWELFTH.

### THE DUTY OF EVERY CHRISTIAN IN COMPLETE ARMOUR TO AID BY PRAYER THE PUBLIC MINISTERS OF CHRIST.

*'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, for which I am an ambassador in bonds'*  
(Eph. 6:19, 20).

The apostle having laid out this duty of prayer in its full compass, taking all saints within its circumference, he comes now to apply the general rule, and claims a share in it himself—*'and for me.'* When he bids them pray 'for all saints,' he surely cannot be shut out of their prayers who is not the least in the number. In the words there are four branches. FIRST. Here is an *exhortation*, or Paul's request for himself, and in him for all ministers of the gospel—*'and for me.'* SECOND. The *matter* of his request—*'that utterance may be given unto me.'* Not that he would confine and determine them in their prayers to this request alone; but he propounds it as a principal head to be insisted on by them on his behalf. THIRD. The *end why* he desires this—*'that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel.'* FOURTH. A *double argument* to back and enforce this request—*'for which I am an ambassador in bonds'*—FIRST. Taken from his office. SECOND. From his present afflicted state.

#### BRANCH FIRST.

[THE REQUEST OF PAUL *as a minister of Christ,  
for the prayers of believers.*]

*'And for me.'*

Here is an *exhortation*, or *Paul's request* for himself, and in him for all ministers of the gospel—*'and for me.'* FIRST. We may note here that people are to be taught the duty they owe to their minister as well as to others. SECOND. It is not only our duty to pray for others, but also to desire the prayers of others for ourselves. THIRD. We may note that the ministers of the gospel are, in an especial manner, to be remembered in the saints' prayers.

FIRST. We may note here *that people are to be taught the duty they owe to their minister as well as to others*; though indeed no duty is harder for the minister to press or for the people to hear—for him to preach with humility and wisdom, or for them to receive without prejudice.

*[It is our duty as well TO DESIRE THE PRAYERS  
OF OTHERS, as to pray for them.]*

SECOND. It is not only our duty to pray for others, but also *to desire the prayers of others for ourselves*. If a Paul turns beggar, and desires the remembrance of others for him, who then needs it not? This hath been the constant practice of the saints. Sometimes they call in the help of their brethren upon special occasions to pray with them. Thus Daniel, ch. 2:18, when required to interpret the king's dream, makes use of 'Hananiah, Mishael,' and 'Azariah, his companions.' 'Then Daniel went to his house, and made the thing known to these that they would desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret.' Daniel would not give an answer to the king till he had got an answer from God. To prayer therefore he goes. No doubt he forgot not his errand in his closet when at his solitary devotions; but withal he calls in help to join in social prayer with him. He sends for them to his house; where, it is probable, they prayed together, for the mutual quickening of their affections and strengthening of their petition by this their united force. Wherefore, he acknowledgeth the mercy as an answer to their concurrent prayers: 'I thank thee, and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who hast made known unto me now what we desired of thee,' ver. 23. This justifies the saints' practice when, in any great strait of temptation or affliction, they get some other of the faithful to give a lift with them at this duty. Sometimes we have them desiring their brethren's prayers for them when they cannot conveniently have it with them. Thus Esther sets the Jews in Shushan to prayer for her, Est. 4:16; so our apostle in many of his epistles desires the saints to carry his name with them to the throne of grace, Rom. 15:30; II Cor. 1:10, 11; Col. 4:3; Php. 1:19. And not without great reason, for,

*First.* God hath made it a *debt which one saint owes to another* to carry their names to a throne of grace. Now, not to desire this debt to be paid, which God hath charged our brethren with, is to undervalue the mercy and goodness of our God. Should a legacy be left us by a friend, were it not a despising of his kindness not to call upon the heir who is to pay it? Surely God accounts he doth us a kindness herein, and therefore may take it ill not to ask for it. It is not our usage to lose a debt for want of a demand, and this is none of the least we have owing to us.

*Second.* Many are the *gracious promises that are made to such prayers of the faithful one for another*. 'If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them,' I John 5:16. But you will say, How can the prayer of one obtain the forgiveness for another? I answer, None is forgiven for the faith of another; this must be personal; but the believing fervent prayer of one

is an excellent means to obtain the grace of repentance and faith for another, whereby he may come to be forgiven. So, 'Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed,' James 5:16. Now, in not desiring our brethren's help in this kind, we make no use of these promises—the proper end of which is to encourage us to call in the auxiliary aid of others—as if such passages of Scripture might have been well spared for any need we have of them. Should you see a piece of ground never sown nor fed, you might well say the ground is barren or the owner a bad husband; either the promise is empty and useless, or we that do not improve it are worse husbands for our souls. But we cannot say so of the promise, if we consider the great fruit and advantage which the saints in all ages have reaped from it. Did not Daniel get the knowledge of a great secret as a return of his companions' prayers with him? Did not Job's friends escape a great judgment that hung over their heads at his intercession? What a miraculous deliverance had Peter at the prayers of a few saints gathered together on his behalf! Bring not therefore an evil report upon this promise, seeing such sweet clusters as these are to be shown that have been gathered from it.

*Third.* If we desire not others to carry our name to a throne of grace, *we are guilty of quenching the Spirit of prayer; which may be done in ourselves and others also.*

1. By this we may *quench it in ourselves.* Partly, because we neglect a duty. We are bid to 'confess our sins one to another,' and for what end but to have the benefit of mutual prayers? The same Spirit which stirs thee up to pray for thyself will excite thee in many cases to set others at prayer for thee; which, if thou dost not, thou overlayest his motions, and so committest a sin. Again, thou quenchest the Spirit of prayer in thyself by depriving thyself of that assistance which thou mightest receive in thy own prayers through theirs; for the Spirit conveys his quickening grace to us in the use of instruments and means. He that doth not hear the word preached quenches his Spirit, because God useth this as bellows to blow up and enkindle the saint's grace. So, he that desires not the prayers of others quenches the Spirit of prayer in himself, because the exercise of their grace in prayer for thee may fetch down more grace to be poured in unto thee.

2. Thou mayest be accessory *to the quenching of the Spirit in others,* because thou hinderest the acting of those graces in them which would have been drawn forth in prayer for thee hadst thou acquainted them with thy condition. Fire is quenched by subtracting fuel as well as by throwing on water. By opening thy wants or desires to thy brethren thou feedest Spirit of prayer in them, as they have new matter administered to work upon; by acquainting them with the merciful providences of God to thee, thou prickest a song of praise for them. How many groans and sighs should God in prayer have had from thy neighbour-saints hadst thou not bit in thy temptations and afflictions from their knowledge! What peals of joy and thankfulness would they have rung hadst thou not concealed thy mercies from them!

*Fourth.* We are to desire others to pray for us, *to express the humble sense we have of our own weakness, and the need we have of others' help.* Humble souls are fearful of their own strength. They that have little, desire partners with them in their

trade; but when they conceit their own private stock to be sufficient, then they can trade by themselves. 'Now are ye full, now are ye rich; ye have reigned as kings without us,' saith Paul of the self-conceited Corinthians. The time was you thought you had need of Paul's preaching to you and praying for you, but now ye reign without us! O how many are there, when time was, could beg prayers of every Christian they met! Nothing but wants and complaints could be heard from them, which made them beg help from all they knew to pray their corruptions down and their graces up. But now they have left the beggar's trade, and reign in an imaginary kingdom of their self-conceited sufficiency. Certainly, as it shows want of charity not to pray *for* others, so no want of pride not to desire prayers *from* others.

*Fifth.* We are to desire others to pray for us, *that we may prevent Satan's designs against us.* He knows very well what an advantage he hath upon the Christian when severed from his company; wherefore he labours what he can to hinder the conjunction of his solitary prayers with the auxiliary aid his brethren might lend him. Samson's strength lay not in a single hair but his whole lock; the saint's safety lies in communion, not in solitude and single devotion. How many, alas! concealing their temptations from others, have found their sorrows grow upon them after all their own private endeavours and wrestlings in secret against them? like one who, when his house is on fire, tries to quench it himself, but is not able, and so hazards the loss of all he hath for want of timely calling his neighbours to his help.

*Sixth.* The *love we owe to our brethren requires* that we should desire others to pray for us. The saints here live where none else love them but themselves, therefore they need not make much of one another. Now this of desiring their prayers carries a threefold expression of love to them.

1. By this we *acknowledge the grace of God in our brethren*, or else it is supposed we would not employ them in such a work. He that desires a friend to present a petition to the king on his behalf, shows he believes him to be in favour, and one that hath some interest in the prince. Now, what more honourable testimony can we give to another than to own him as a child of God, one whose prayers are welcome to heaven? We are bid to 'prefer every one his brother in honour.' Now no one way can we do this more than by making use of their help at the throne of grace to be our remembrancers to the Lord.

2. By this we do our utmost to *interest our brethren in the mercy we desire them to pray for.* Were a merchant to send some commodity to Turkey or Spain which he knows will make a gainful return, it would be a great favour to take others into partnership with him in the adventure. And what voyage is gainful like this of prayer? and whoever shares in the duty is partner in the mercy.

3. By this we confirm them in *a confidence of our readiness to pray for them.* What consists good neighbourhood in but a readiness to reciprocate kindnesses one to another?—when that is at the service of one neighbour which is in the house of another? Now, who will be bold or free with his neighbour to take a kindness from him that is not willing to receive the like? Be ye strange to your friend, and you

teach him to be so to yourself. Nothing endears Christians more in love than an open heart one to another. A friend should have no cabinet in his bosom to which he allows not his friend a key.

*Objection (1.)* But do we not, by desiring our fellow-saints' prayers, *intrench upon Christ's mediatory office?*

*Answer.* No; surely *Christ would not command that which would be a wrong to himself.* There is great difference betwixt our desiring Christ to pray for us and our fellow-brethren. We desire Christ to present our persons and prayers, expecting acceptation of both through his blood and intercession. But no such matter from the prayers of our brethren; we only desire them as friends to bear us company to the throne of grace, there to present our prayers in a communion together, expecting the welcome of both their and our prayers, not from them, but from Christ —relying on Christ to procure the welcome both to our prayers and theirs at our heavenly Father's hand.

*Objection (2.)* But why, then, *may we not desire the prayers of the deceased saints* for the same purpose we desire the prayers of those that yet live with us?

*Answer (1.)* We have *no precept or example for this in the word;* and unbidden there in duties of worship, is forbidden. We must not be 'wise above what is written.' Not to use the means which God hath appointed is a great sin, which was Ahaz's case; but to invent ways or means more than God hath appointed is far worse. It is bad enough for a subject not to keep the king's laws, but far worse for him to presume to mint a law of his own head. The first is undutiful, but the latter is a traitor.

*Answer (2.)* We have *no way of expressing our thoughts and desires to the saints departed.* Why should we pray to them that cannot hear what we say? or where is the messenger to send our minds by? or which the word in Scripture that saith they hear in heaven what we pray on earth?

*Answer (3.)* It is the prerogative of Christ to be the *only agent in heaven for his saints on earth.* "To which of the angels or saints did God say, 'Sit thou at my right hand?' In the outward temple we find the whole congregation praying, but into the holy of holiest entered none but the high priest with his perfume. Every saint is a priest to offer up prayers for himself and others on earth; but Christ only as our High-priest intercedes in heaven for us. The glorious angels and saints there no doubt wish well to the church below; but it is Christ's office to receive the incense of his militant saints' prayers, which they send up from this outward temple here below to heaven, and to offer it with all their desires to God; so that, to employ any in heaven besides Christ to pray for us, is to put Christ out of office.

*[Use or Application.]*

*Use First.* It *reproves those into whose hearts it never yet came to beg prayers for their own souls.* Surely they are great strangers to themselves, and ignorant what a

privilege they lose! As Christ said to the woman of Samaria, If thou hadst known the gift of God, and who it is that asks, thou wouldst have asked, and he would have given. Did poor souls know who the saints are—what favourites with God, and how prevalent their prayers are with him—they would not willingly be left out of their remembrance. I never knew any but, as soon as God began to work upon them—though it were no more than to awaken their consciences—thought this worth the desiring. It is natural for man in straits to crave help. A servant or a child, when master or father are displeased and blows are threatened, if they know any that have interest in their favour, and are more likely to prevail with them than others, then they entreat such to become suitors for them. When hunger and want pinch the poor, then, if they have any neighbour to be their friend, to speak to the parish for them, he shall soon hear of them. Now, were the sense of their wants or troubles of a higher nature, would they not be as earnest to desire prayers for their souls as now they are to beg bread for their bodies? Well, you that fear God, and live among such, do your duty, though they have not hearts to desire it at your hands, pray over their stupid souls before the Lord. When a friend is sick, and his senses are gone, you do not stay to send for the physician till he comes to himself and is able to desire you to do it for him. You had need make the more haste to God for such as these, lest they go away in this apoplexy of conscience, and so be past praying for.

*Use Second.* It reproveth those who desire prayers of God's people, but hypocritically; and they are such as set others on work, but pray not for themselves—a certain sign of a naughty heart. Thus Pharaoh often called for Moses to pray for him and his land; but we read not that ever he made any address himself to God, but thought it enough to send another on his errand; whereas a gracious soul will be sure to meet him he employs at the work. 'I beseech you,' saith Paul, 'to strive together with me' in your prayers to God for me. He did not slip the collar off his own neck to put it on another's, but drew together with them in it; else they that pray for thee may pray the mercy away from thee.

*Use Third.* It reproveth such as desire prayers of others, but it is only in some great pinch. If their chariot is set fast in some deep slough of affliction, then they send in all haste for some to draw them out with their prayer, who, at another time, change their thoughts of the saints' prayers, yea, and of God himself. The frogs once gone, and Moses hears no more of Pharaoh till another plague rubs up his memory. Moses hears not Pharaoh cry till Pharaoh hears the frogs croak. Thus, as they say of coral, it is soft in the water where it grows, and hard when taken out; many, their consciences are soft and tender whilst sleeping in affliction, but hard and stout when that is removed. Pharaoh that so oft called Moses up to prayer, at last could not endure the sight of him, but forewarned him for ever coming in his sight. O take heed of this! When once the wretch came to that pass, and so strangely changed his note as to drive Moses from him, that had so often bailed and rescued him out of the hands of divine vengeance, then he had not long to live, for he removed the very dam, and lift up the sluice to let in ruin upon himself.

*Use Fourth.* It reproves such as desire others to pray for them, but *vaingloriously*—to gain a reputation for religion. Beware of this; yet charge not all for the hypocrisy of some, neither deprive thyself of the benefit of others' prayers out of an imaginary fear lest thou shouldst play the hypocrite therein. Watch thy heart, but waive not the duty. Because some have strangled themselves with their own garters, wilt thou therefore be afraid to wear thine? Or because some canting beggars go about the country to show their sores, which they desire not to have cured, wilt not thou therefore, when wounded, go to the chirurgeon?

[MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL *have a special claim*  
*on the prayers of believers.*]

THIRD. From this request of the apostle we may note *that the ministers of the gospel are, in an especial manner, to be remembered in the saints' prayers*; and that,

*First.* In regard of God, whose message they bring. They come about his work and deliver his errand. Not to pray for them will be interpreted you wish not well to the business they have in hand for him. They do not only come from God, but with Christ. 'We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain,' II Cor. 6:1. Christ and the minister go into the pulpit together. A greater than man is there; master and servant are both at work.

Again, the blessing of the minister's labour is from God; not the hand that sets the plant or sows the seed, but God's blessing, gives the increase, I Cor. 3:6. When Melancthon was first converted, the light of the gospel shone so clear and strong a beam on his own eyes, that he thought he should convert all he preached unto. He deemed it was impossible his hearers should withstand that truth which he saw with so much evidence; but he afterwards found the contrary, which made him say, 'I see now that the old Adam is too hard for the young Melancthon.' God carries the key by his girdle that alone can open hearts, and prayer is the key to open his. When Christ intended to send forth his disciples to preach the gospel, he sets them solemnly to prayer, Matt. 9:38. Many are the promises which he hath given to the ministers of the gospel for their protection—that he will keep these stars in his right hand, or else they had been on the ground and stamped under foot long ere this—for their assistance and success in the work: 'I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say,' Ex. 4:12. 'Go ye therefore, and teach all nations...I am with you alway, unto the end of the world,' Matt. 28:19, 20. Wherefore are these promises, but to be shot back again in prayers to God that gave them?

*Second.* In regard of the ministers themselves. There is not a greater object of pity and prayer in the whole world than the faithful ministers of Christ; if you consider,

1. The *importance of their work*. It is temple work, and that is weighty; which made Paul, that had the broadest shoulders of all his brethren, cry out, 'Who is sufficient for these things?' 'I am doing a great work,' said Nehemiah, Neh. 6:3. But

what was that to his? No work more hazardous to carry in than this. It is sad enough to drop to hell from under the pulpit—to hear the gospel, and yet to perish; but O how dismal to fall out of it thither for unfaithfulness to the work! The consideration of this made Paul so bestir him; ‘knowing the terror of the Lord we persuade men.’

2. It is a *laborious work*. ‘Know them which labour among you...and admonish you,’ I Thes. 5:12; those who labour in the word and doctrine, @Ë 6@B4ä<J,H—which labour to weariness. He that preaches as he should, shall find it a work, and not play. Not a work of an hour while speaking in the pulpit, but a load that lies heavy on his shoulders all the week long; a labour that spends the vitals, and consumes the oil which should feed the lamp of nature; such a labour, in a word, as makes old age and youth oft meet together. The Jews took Christ to be about fifty years old when he was little above thirty, John 8:57. I find some give this reason of it, because Christ had so macerated his body with labour in preaching, fasting, and watching, that it aged his very countenance and made him look older than he was. Other callings are, many of them, but as exercise to nature; they blow off the ashes from its coal, and help to discharge nature of those superfluities which oppress it. Who eats his bread more heartily, and sleeps more sweetly, than the ploughman? But the minister’s work debilitates nature. It is hard for him to eat and work too. Like the candle, he wastes while he shines. Whatever work is thought harder than other, we have it borrowed to set forth the minister’s labour. They are called soldiers, watchmen, husbandmen, yea, their work is set out by the pangs of a woman in travail. Some of them indeed have easier labours than other—those who find more success of their ministry than their brethren; but who can tell the throes that *their* souls feel who all the time of their ministry go in travail and bring forth dead children at last?

3. It is *opposed work by hell and earth*.

(1.) It is opposed *by hell*. The devil never liked temple work; he that was at Joshua’s right hand to resist him, is at the minister’s elbow to disturb him, and that both in study and pulpit also. ‘I would have come,’ saith Paul, ‘but Satan hindered.’ Who can tell all the devices that Satan hath to take the minister off or hinder him in his work? One while he discourageth him, that he is ready with Jonah to run away with his charge; another while he is blowing of him up with pride. Even Paul himself hath a thorn given him in his flesh to keep pride out of his heart. Sometimes he roils him with passion, and leavens his zeal into sourness and unmercifulness. This the disciples were tainted with, when they called for fire to come down from heaven upon those that stood in their way. Sometimes he chills their zeal, and intimidates their spirits into cowardice and self-pity. Thus Peter favoured himself when he denied his Master; and when at another time he dissembled with the Jews, to curry their favour.

(2.) It is opposed *by the wicked world*. ‘To be a minister,’ said Luther, ‘is nothing else but to derive the world’s wrath and fury upon himself.’ How are they loaden with reproaches! This dirt lies so thick nowhere as on the minister’s coat. What odious names did the best of men, the apostles themselves, go under? And it were well they

would only smite them with the tongue; but you shall find in all ages persecutors have thirsted most after their blood. The persecution in the Acts begins with the cutting off of James' head. Seven thousand could lie better his in Jezebel's time than one prophet. These are the burdensome stones which every one is lifting at, though none can do it without bruising his own fingers. In every national storm almost, they are taken up to be thrown overboard for those that raised it. How many are there of an opinion that nothing keeps them from seeing happy days but the standing of them and their office? O miserable happiness, which cannot be bought and purchased but with the ruin of those that bring the tidings of peace and salvation to them all! Such a happiness this would be as the sheep had in the fable, when persuaded to have the dogs that kept the wolves off killed; or as the passengers at sea would have when their pilot is thrown overboard. In a word, such a happiness as the Jews had when Christ was taken out of the way by their murderous hands. They slew him to preserve themselves from the Romans destroying their city, but brought them with irreparable ruin by this very means upon their own head.

4. That which adds weight to all the former is, *that the men who are to bear this heavy burden, and to conflict with all these difficulties and dangers, are those who have no stronger shoulders than others*; for they are men subject to the like infirmities with their brethren. Now, will not all this melt you into compassion towards them, and your compassion send you to prayer for them? Shall they stand in the face of death and danger, where Satan's bullets, and man's also, fly so thick, and you not be at the pains to raise a breast-work before them for their defence by your prayers?

*Third.* In regard of yourselves. Love to yourselves will plead to pray for them.

1. Consider their ministry is *an office set up on purpose for your sakes*. It was never intended for the exalting of a few men above their brethren, but for the service of your faith. The gifts that Christ hath given to men, Eph. 4—that is, their office and abilities to discharge it—are both for the edifying of the body of Christ, and will you not pray for those that from one end of the year to the other are at work for you? If you had but a child or servant sent abroad about your worldly business, would you not send a prayer after him? Thus did good Jacob, when his children went on his errand to Egypt: 'God Almighty give you mercy before this man.' Will you not do thus much for your poor minister, and pray God Almighty go with him, when in his study to prepare, and when in the pulpit to deliver what he hath prepared for our souls?

2. The ministers' miscarriage is *dangerous to the people*; therefore pray for them, lest you be led into temptation by their falls. The sins of teachers are the teachers of sin. If the nurse be sick, the child is in danger to suck the disease from her that lies at her breast. If the minister be tainted with an error, it is strange if many of his people should not catch the infection; when, if he be loose and scandalous in his life, he is like a common well or fountain, corrupted and muddied, at which all the town draw their water. The devil aimed at more than Peter when he desired leave to try a fall with him. 'Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have thee, that he may sift thee as wheat,' Luke 22:31. He knew his fall was like to strike up the heels of

many others. The minister's practice makes a greater sound than his doctrine. They who forget his sermon, will remember his example to quote it for their apology and defence when time serves. Peter withdraws, and 'other Jews dissembled with him,' Gal. 2:12, 13. Truly, friends, your ministers are but men, and of no stronger than yourselves—men subject to the like passions. He among them that presumes he shall not slide into an error, or fall into a sin, is bolder than any promise in the word gives him leave. They need your prayers as much as any, and those most that fear their danger least.

3. By praying for the minister you take *the most hopeful way to profit by his ministry*. Such a soul as this may come in expectation to have a portion laid on his trencher; his meal is spoke for; and such guests as send to heaven before they come to an ordinance are most likely to have the best entertainment. He that hears a sermon, and hath not prayed for the minister, and the success of his labours, sits down to his meat before he hath craved a blessing; he plays the thief to his own soul, while he robs the minister of the assistance his prayers might have brought him in from heaven. Pinch the nurse, and you starve the child. The less the minister is prayed for, the less, it is to be feared, will the people profit by him.

4. By praying for the minister you do not only render the word he preacheth more effectual to yourselves, but *you also interest yourselves in the good his ministry does to others*. As there is a way of partaking in others' sins, so in others' holy services. He that strengthens the hands of a sinner any way in his wicked practices, makes his sin his own, and shall partake with him in the wages due to the work when the day of reckoning comes. So he that strengthens the minister's hand in his holy work, whether by prayer, countenance, or relief of his necessities, becomes a partaker with him in his service, and shall not be left out in the reward, Matt. 10:40. We read there of 'a prophet's reward' given to private Christians; they who communicate with the minister in his labour, by any subserviency to it, shall share in the reward. When God comes to reward his prophets for their faithful service, then Obadiah that hid them from the fury of their persecutors—then Onesiphorus that refreshed their bowels—yea, then all those faithful ones that put up their fervent prayers for the free course of the gospel in their ministry—shall be called in to share with them in the reward. He that hath but a fifteenth part in a ship is an owner as well as he that hath more; and, when the voyage is over, he hath his share of the return that is made proportionable to his part. O what an encouragement is this to have a stock going in this bottom!—yea, to venture than ever at the throne of grace for the now despised ministers of Christ, seeing heaven's promise is our insuring office to secure all we send to sea upon this account.

## BRANCH SECOND.

[THE MATTER OF PAUL'S REQUEST, *as a minister of Christ, for the prayers of believers.*]

The second branch in the general division of the words follows, and contains the *matter of the apostle's request* to the church of Ephesus, or what he desires them to mention to God in his behalf—*'that utterance may be given unto me.'* Where observe, FIRST. The *spirituality* of his desire. He sets them not a praying for carnal things, the world's honour or riches; no, we hear him not so much as mention his necessities and outward wants, which he, being now a prisoner, it is like, was no great stranger to; but they are spiritual wants he most groans under. He desires the charity of their prayers more than of their purse.

SECOND. Observe the *public concernment* of that he begs prayers for—*'that utterance may be given me.'* This is not a personal privilege, that would redound only on his own private advantage, but which renders him useful to others—that which may fit him for his public employment in the church; from which we may gather this note.

*[What the minister of Christ chiefly  
desires believers' prayers for.]*

NOTE. A faithful minister's heart runs *more on his work than on himself*. That which he chiefly desires is how he may best discharge his ministerial trust. No doubt Paul spake out of the abundance of his heart. That comes out first of which his heart was most full, and for which his thoughts were most solicitous; as if he had said, If you will take me into your prayers, let this be your request, *'That utterance may be given me.'* Wherever, almost, you find him begging prayers, he forgets not this: *'Pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course,'* II Thes. 3:1; *'Praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ,'* Col. 4:3. Admirable are the expressions whereby this holy man declares how deeply his heart was engaged in the work of the Lord. He tells them that his very soul and spirit was set upon it: *'Whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son,'* Rom. 1:9. Never did any more long for preferment in the church, than he to preach the gospel to the church. *'I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift,'* ver. 11. He professeth himself a debtor to all sorts of men; he hath a heart and tongue to preach to all that have an ear to hear: *'I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise,'* ver. 14. Yea, he was *'ready to preach the gospel'* ver. 15, where he should stand in the mouth of death and danger. This so took up his thoughts, that for it he threw all his worldly concernments at his heels. As for the world's riches, he professeth he progged<sup>[1]</sup> not for it: *'I seek not yours, but you,'* II Cor. 12:14. He had a nobler merchandise in his eye. He had rather preach them into Christ, than their money into his purse. And for their respect and love, though it was due debt to him, yet he lays it aside, and on he will go with his work, though they give him no thanks for his pains: *'I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved.'* His duty he will do to them, and leaves them to look to theirs to him. The nurse draws forth her

breast to the child, though forward, because she looks for her reward, not from the child, but its parent. God will reward the faithful minister, though his people will not thank him for his labour.

In a word, his very life was not valued by him when it stood in competition with his work: 'But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus,' Acts 20:24. And not without great reason is it that ministers should prefer their duty above all temporal respects. They are servants to God; and a servant must look to his work, whatever becomes of himself. Abraham's servant would not eat till he had done his message; and when it sped, neither would he stay then to lose time, but posts back again with all expedition to his master, Gen. 24:33. He said well who was employed to relieve the city of Rome with corn, who, when the master of the ship would have had him stay for fair weather, answered, 'It is necessary that we sail, not that we live.' It is necessary the minister should fulfil his ministry, not that he should be rich, not that he should be in reputation. The incomparable value of souls is such as should make hazard our whole temporal stake to promote their eternal salvation. He that wins souls is wise, though he lose his own life in the work. But we come to a more particular inquiry into these words, what the apostle means by 'utterance,' which he desires may be given him. A parallel place to this we have, Col. 4:3, 4. Three things we may conceive the apostle drives at in this his request.

*[Threefold import of Paul's request, when he desires that UTTERANCE be prayed for.]*

*First.* By 'utterance' may be meant *liberty to preach the gospel*;—that his mouth might not be stopped by the persecutor, who had him already his prisoner. Now he desires they would pray for him, that he might not be quite taken off his work: where,

1. Observe what a *grievous affliction it is to a faithful minister to be denied liberty to preach the gospel*. So long as Paul might preach, though in a chain, he is not much troubled; the word is free, though he be bound. But, to have his mouth stopped, to see poor souls ready to perish for want of that bread which he hath to give out, and yet may not be allowed this liberty, goes to his heart. 'O pray,' saith he, 'that utterance may be given.' If he may not preach, neither should he live; for upon this account alone he desired life—the furtherance of their faith, Php. 1:25. O how far are they from Paul's mind, to whom it is more tedious to preach than grievous to be kept from the work! How seldom should we see some in the pulpit, were it not a necessary expedient to bring in their revenue at the year's end!

2. The *liberty of the gospel, and of the ministers to deliver it, are in an especial manner to be prayed for*.

(1.) Because this is *strongly opposed and maligned by Satan and his instruments*. Wherever God opens a door for his gospel there Satan raiseth his batteries. 'For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many

adversaries,' I Cor. 16:9. No sooner doth God open his shop-windows, but the devil is at work to shut them again, or hinder the free-trade of his gospel. Other men's servants can work peaceably in their master's shop, but as for God's servants, every one hath a stone to throw in at them as they pass by. When Paul began to preach at Thessalonica, the city was presently in an uproar and cry, 'These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also,' Acts 17:6. Indeed they said true; let the gospel have but liberty and it will 'turn the world upside down.' It will make a change, but a happy one. This the devil knows, and therefore dreads its approach.

(2.) Because it is the *choicest mercy that God can bless a nation with*. Happy are the people that are in such a case. It is the gospel of the kingdom; it lifts a people up to heaven. We could better spare the sun out of its orb than the preaching of the gospel out of the church. Souls might find the way to heaven, though the sun should not lend them its light; but without the light of truth they cannot take one right step towards it. Work, saith Christ, 'while ye have the light,' John 12:36. Salvation-work cannot be done by the candle-light of a natural understanding, but by the daylight of gospel revelation; this sun must rise before man can go forth to this labour.

(3.) It is God's power to *preserve the liberty of his gospel and messengers*, in spite of the devil and his instruments. Therefore, indeed, Paul sends them not to court to beg his liberty, but to heaven. God had Nero closer prisoner than he had Paul. 'Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it,' Rev. 3:8. At Ephesus were many adversaries we heard, yet the door was kept open. Christ carries the keys of the church-door at his girdle: 'He that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth,' Rev. 3:7, 'the key of the house of David,' so Isa. 22:22. The church is Christ's house, and the master sure will keep the key of his own door.

(4.) Prayer hath a mighty *power with God to preserve or restore liberty to his gospel and messengers*. It hath fetched home his servants from banishment, it hath brought them out of their dungeon. The prison could not hold Peter when the church was at prayer for him. It hath had a mighty influence into the church's affairs when at the lowest ebb. It was a sad world to the church in Nero's time, when Paul set the saints a praying for kings and those that were in authority; which prayers, though they were not answered in Nero, yet I doubt not but afterwards they were in Constantine and other Christian princes, under whose royal wing the church of Christ was cherished and protected.

(5.) Pray for their liberty, because, *when the gospel goes away, it goes not alone, but carries away your other mercies along with it*. The hangings that are taken down when the prince removes his court. Where the minister hath not liberty to preach the truth, the people will not long have liberty to profess it. When it went ill with James the apostle, it went not well with the church at Jerusalem, Acts 12:1, 2, nor can that place look long to enjoy its outward peace. When God removes his gospel, it is to make way for worse company to come, even all his sore plagues and judgements, Jer. 6:8.

*Second.* When the apostle desires 'utterance' to be given him, he may mean *that he may have a word given him to preach*—according to that which Christ promiseth, 'It shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak,' Matt. 10:19. From which we may note:

1. That ministers have *no ability of their own for their work*. O how long may they sit tumbling their books over, and beating their brains, till God comes to their help; and then, as Jacob's venison, it is brought to their hand! If God drop not down his assistance, we write with a pen that hath no ink. If any in the world need walk pendantly upon God more than others, the minister is he.

2. Observe that those who are most eminent for gifts and grace have *meanest thoughts of themselves, and are acquainted most with their own insufficiency*. Paul himself is not ashamed to let Christians know that if God brings it not into him he cannot deal out to them; he cannot speak a word to them till he receives it from God: 'Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; who also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament,' II Cor. 3:5, 6. He is the able minister whom God enables.

3. Observe, the *meanest Christian may, by his faithful prayers, help to make the minister's sermon for him*. 'Pray,' saith the apostle, 'that utterance may be given unto me;' that I may have from God what I should deliver to others. O what a useful instrument is a praying Christian! he may not only help his own minister, but others even all the world over. Paul was now at Rome, and sends for prayers as far as to the saints at Ephesus.

*Third.* By 'utterance' he may mean a *faculty of speech—a readiness and facility to deliver to others what he hath been enabled to conceive in his own mind of the will of God*. Many eminent servants of God have been very sensible of, and much discouraged for, their impeded speech and hesitant delivery. Now this may proceed from a natural cause, or supernatural.

1. From a *natural cause*. As,

(1.) From a *defect in the instruments of speech*; which some think was the cause of Moses' complaint, 'I am not eloquent,...but I am slow of speech,' Ex. 4:10. And this discouraged him from being sent on God's errand. But God can compensate the hesitancy of the tongue with the divine power of the matter delivered. This Moses, who was so 'slow of speech,' yet was 'mighty in words,' Acts 7:22, able to make Pharaoh's stout heart to tremble, though he might stammer in the delivery of it. God promised indeed to be 'with his mouth;' yet, it is probable, he did not cure his natural infirmity, for we find him complaining afterwards of it. Such natural imperfections, therefore, should neither discourage the minister nor prejudice the people; but rather make him more careful that the matter be weighty he delivers, and them that their attention be more close and united.

(2.) From a *weak memory*. He that reads in a bad print, where many letters are defaced, cannot read fast and smooth, but will oft be stopped to study what is next. Memory is an inward table or book, out of which the minister reads his sermon

unseen. If the notions or meditations we have to deliver be not fairly imprinted on our memory, no wonder that the tongue is oft at a stand, except we should speak to no purpose. If the hopper be stopped, the mill cannot grind; or if the pipe that feeds the cistern be obstructed, it will be seen at the cock. When God hath assisted in the study, we need him to strengthen our memory in the pulpit.

(3.) From *fear*. If the heart faint, it is no wonder the tongue falters. This, it is like, was at the bottom of Jeremiah's excuse: 'Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child,' Jer. 1:6. That is, I want the courage and spirit of a man to wrestle with these oppositions that will certainly meet me in the work. That this was his infirmity appears by the method God takes for the cure: 'Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee,...be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee,' ver. 7, 8.

2. From a *supernatural cause*; where none of these defects are, but the minister stands best furnished and in greatest readiness for his work. Yet, let but God turn the cock, and there is a stop put to the whole work. Not only 'the preparations of the heart,' but 'the answer of the tongue,' both are 'of the Lord,' Prov. 16:1. God keeps the key of the mouth as well as of the heart; not a word can get out, but sticks in the teeth while [*i.e.* until] God opens the doors of the lips to give it a free egress. He opened the mouth of the ass, and stopped the mouth of that wicked prophet its master. Hear him confessing as much to Balak: 'Lo, I am come unto thee: have I now any power at all to say anything? the word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak,' Num. 22:38. Never man desired more to be speaking than he; that which should have got him his hire, the wages of unrighteousness, for he loved it dearly. But God had tongue-tied him. Nay, even holy men, when they would speak the truth, and that for God, cannot deliver themselves of what they have conceived in their inward meditations. Hence David's prayer: 'Open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise.' Ezekiel he would 'make his tongue cleave to the roof of his mouth;' he should not reprove them though he would, Eze. 3:26.

[*Use or Application.*]

*Use First. To ministers. Do ministers depend thus on God for utterance? This speaks to you, my brethren in the Lord's work. Do nothing for which God may stop your mouths when you come into the pulpit.*

1. Take heed of *any sin smothering in your bosoms*. Canst thou believe God will assist thee in his work who canst lend thy hand to the devil's? Mayest thou not rather fear he should hang a padlock on thy lips, and strike thee dumb, when thou goest about thy work? You remember the story of Origen, how after his great fall he was silenced in the very pulpit; for, at the reading of that, 'What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldst take my covenant in thy mouth?' Ps. 50:16, the conscience of his sin would not suffer him to speak. O it is sad when the preacher meets his own sin in his subject, and pronounceth sentence against himself while he

reads his text! If thou wouldst have God assist thee, be zealous and repent. When the trumpet is washed, then the Holy Spirit, thou mayest hope, will again breathe through it.

2. Beware thou comest not *in the confidence of thy own preparation*. God hath declared himself against this kind of pride: 'By strength shall no man prevail,' I Sam. 2:9. A little bread with God's blessing may make a meal for multitude, and great provision may soon shrink to nothing if God help not in the breaking of it. It is not thy sermon in thy head, or notes in thy book, will enable thee to preach except God open thy mouth. Acknowledge therefore God in all thy ways, and 'lean not to thy own understanding.' The swelling of the heart as well as of the wall goes before a fall. Did the Ephraimites take it so ill that Gideon would steal a victory without calling them to his help? How much more may it provoke God, when thou goest to the pulpit, and passest by his door in the way without calling for his assistance?

*Use Second. To the people.* Take heed you do not *stop your ministers' mouths*. This you may do,

1. *By admiring their gifts and applauding their persons*; especially when this is accompanied with unthankfulness to God that gives them; when you applaud the man, but do not bless God for him. Princes have an evil eye upon those subjects that are over-popular. God will not let his creatures stand in his light, nor have his honour suffer by the reputation of his instrument. The mother likes not to see the child taken with the nurse more than with herself. O how foolish are we, who cannot love, but we must dote; not honour, what we adore also! He that would keep his posey fresh and sweet, must smell and lay it down again—not hold it too long in his hand, or breathe too much upon it; this is the way soon to welter it. To overdo is the ready way to undo. Many fair mercies are thus overlaid and pressed to death by the excess of a fond affection; or when it is accompanied with detracting of others—the abilities of one are cried up to cry down the another. 'I am of Paul, and I am of Apollos.' Thus the disciples of either advanced their preacher to hold up a faction.

2. You may provoke God to withdraw his assistance *by expecting the benefit from man and not from God*; as if it were nothing but to take up your cloak and Bible, and you are sure to get good by such a one's ministry. This is like them in James, that say, 'We will go into such a city, and get gain;' as if it were no more to hear with profit than to go to the tap and draw wine or beer in your own cellar! It is just thou shouldst find the vessel frozen—the minister, I mean, straitened, and his abilities bound up—because thou comest to him as unto a God who is but a poor instrument. O say not to him, Give me grace, give me comfort, as Rachel asked children of her husband; but go to thy God for these in thy attendance on man.

3. You may provoke God to withdraw his assistance *by rebelling against the light of truth that shines forth upon you in his ministry*. God sometimes stops the minister's mouth because the people shut their hearts. Why should the cock run to have the water spilt upon the ground? Christ himself did 'not many mighty works'—'he could not,' saith Mark—in his own country, 'because of their unbelief.' *Dei justitia non*

*permitteret, ut sanctum canibus daretur*, saith Brugensis upon the place—it is just God should take away the ministry, or stop the minister's mouth, when they despise his counsel, and the word becomes a reproach to them. I am sure it is a sad dump to the minister's spirit, that preacheth long to a gainsaying people, and no good omen to them. The mother's milk goes away sometimes before the child's death. God binds up the spirit of his messengers in judgment: 'I will make thy tongue cleave to the roof of thy mouth, that thou shalt be dumb, and shalt not be to them a reprover: for they are a rebellious house,' Eze. 3:26.

### BRANCH THIRD.

[THE END *in Paul's request as a minister of Christ for the prayers of believers.*]

*'That I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel.'*

The third branch in the division of the words presents us with the end why he desires their prayers for utterance to be granted him, expressed in these words—*'that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel;'* where there are these three observables. FIRST. The sublime *nature* of the gospel—it is *'a mystery.'* SECOND. Wherein lies the *work* of a gospel minister—*'to make known the mystery of the gospel.'* THIRD. The *manner* how he is to perform this work —*'that I may open my mouth boldly.'*

[*What is meant by a 'mystery,' and in what respects the gospel is one.*]

FIRST OBSERVABLE. The sublime *nature of the gospel*—it is *'a mystery.'* The Greek word  $\mu\text{LFJZD}4\text{T}$  some derive from  $\mu\text{LXT}$ , to teach any secret belonging to religion; others of  $\mu\text{bT}$  or  $\mu\text{b.T}$ , to shut the mouth, because those that were initiated or admitted to be present at the religious rites and mysteries of the heathens—who were called  $\mu\text{bFJ}^4$ —might not reveal them to those that were  $\bullet\mu\text{b}<\text{J}@4$ , or not initiated. Therefore they had an image before the temple, holding his finger upon his mouth, to put them in mind as they went in and out of keeping secret what was done within. Indeed the mysteries in their idolatrous worship were so impure and filthy that nothing but secrecy could keep them from being abhorred and detested by the more sober part of mankind; and it is not unworthy of our noting what I find observed to my hand by a learned pen—that the Spirit of God should make choice of that word in the New Testament so often to express the holy doctrine of truth and salvation

contained in it, which was so vilely abused by those heathenish idolaters; surely it shows them to be over-scrupulous that judge it unlawful any way to make use of those names or things which have been abused by heathens or idolaters. (R. Sanderson on I Tim. 3:16.) But, to return to the word 'mystery;' it hath obtained in our usual speech to be applied to any secret, natural, civil, or religious, which lies out of the road of vulgar understandings. In Scripture it is generally used for religious secrets; and it is taken both in an evil sense and in a good.

[*What is meant by a 'MYSTERY.'*]

*First.* The word mystery is used in an *evil sense*. 'The mystery of iniquity doth already work,' II Thes. 2:7; whereby is meant the secret rising antichristian dominion, whereof some foundations were laid even in the apostle's days. Error is but a day younger than truth. When the gospel began first to be preached by Christ and his apostles, error presently put forth her hand to take it by the heel and supplant it. The whole system of antichristianism is a mystery of policy and impiety. Mystery is written upon the whore of Babylon's forehead, Rev. 17:2. And Causabon tells us the same word was written upon the pope's mitre; if so, it is well he would own his name. 'My soul, enter not thou into their secrets.'

*Second.* In a *good sense*. Sometimes for some particular branch of evangelical truth. Thus the rejection of the Jews and calling of the Gentiles is called a 'mystery,' Rom. 11:25; the wonderful change of those that shall be upon the earth at the end of the world, I Cor. 15:51; the incarnation, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, I Tim. 3:16; with others. Sometimes it is used for the whole body of the gospel; as to the doctrine of it, called a 'mystery of faith,' I Tim. 3:9; as to the purity of its precepts and rules for a holy life, a 'mystery of godliness;' as to the author, subject, and end of it, called 'the mystery of Christ,' Eph. 3:4—it was revealed by him, treats of him, and leads souls to him; and lastly, in regard of the blessed reward it promiseth to all that sincerely embrace it, called 'the mystery of the kingdom of God,' Mark 4:11. This gospel is the glorious mystery we are now to speak of; and we will show in what respect it is a mystery, or why so called by the Spirit of God.

[*WHY OR IN WHAT RESPECTS  
the gospel is a mystery.*]

*First.* Because it is *known only by divine revelation*. Such a secret it is that the wit of man could never have found out. There are many secrets in nature, which, with much plodding and study, have at last been discovered, as the medicinal virtue of plants and the like; but the gospel is a secret, and contains in it such mysteries as were *omni ingenio altiora*—beyond the reach of all genius, as Calvin saith. What man or angel could have thought of such a way for reconciling God and man as in the gospel is laid out? How impossible was it for them to have conjectured what purposes of love

were locked up in the heart of God towards fallen man, till himself did open the cabinet of his own counsel? Or had God given them some hint of a purpose he had for man's recovery, could they ever have so much as thought of such a way as the gospel brings to light? Surely as none but God could lay the plot, so none but himself could make it known. The gospel therefore is called 'a revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began,' Rom. 16:25.

*Second.* Because the gospel when revealed, *its truths exceed the grasp of human understanding.* They are the eye of our reason as the sun is to the eye of our body, such a *nimum excellens*—exceeding excellency, as dazzles and overpowers the most piercing apprehension. They disdain to be discussed and tried by human reason. That there are three subsistences in the Godhead, and but one divine essence, we believe, because there revealed. But he that shall fly too near this light, as thinking to comprehend this mysterious truth in his narrow reason, will soon find himself lost in his bold enterprise. God and man, united in Christ's person, is undeniably demonstrable from the gospel. But, alas! the cordage of our understanding is too short to fathom this great deep. 'Without controversy,' saith the apostle, 'great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh,' I Tim. 3:16. It is a truth without controversy,  $\text{O}\mu\text{@}8\text{@}(\text{@L}\mu\text{X}<\text{TH}$ —it is confessed of all, yet such a mystery as is not fordable by our short-legged understanding. That there is no name but the name of Jesus by which we can be saved is the grand notion of the gospel; but how many mysteries are wrapped up in this one truth? Who that should have seen the babe Jesus when he lay in the manger, and afterward meanly bred under a carpenter, and at last executed for a malefactor, could have imagined, as one saith, that upon such weak hinges should move such a glorious design for man's salvation? But who dares think it unreasonable to believe that upon God's report to be true, which we cannot make out by our own understanding? Some things we apprehend by reason that cannot be known by sense—as that the sun is bigger than the earth; some things by sense, which cannot be found out by reason. That the lodestone attracts iron, and not gold, our eye beholds; but why it should, there our reason is dunced and posed. Now if in nature we question not the truth of these, though sense be at a loss in one and reason in the other, shall we in religion doubt of that to be true which drops from God's own mouth and pen, because it exceeds our weak understanding? Wouldst thou see a reason, saith Augustine, for all that God saith? look into thy own understanding, and thou wilt find a reason why thou seest not a reason.

*Third.* It is a mystery *in regard of the paucity of those to whom it is revealed.* Secrets are whispered into the ears of a few, and not exposed to all. 'Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God,' Mark 4:11. Who were those 'you,' but a few disciples who believed on his name? The greater part of the world were ever strangers to this mystery. Before Christ's time it was impaled within a little spot of ground of the Jewish nation. Since it came abroad into the Gentile world, and hath been travelling above these sixteen hundred years hither and thither, how few at this day are acquainted with it! Indeed, where its glorious light shines

long, many get a literal notional knowledge of it—it were strange that men should walk long in the sun and not have their faces a little tanned with it; but the spiritual and saving knowledge of this mystery is revealed but to few, for the number of saints is not great compared with the reprobate world.

*Fourth.* It is a mystery *in regard of the sort of men to whom it is chiefly imparted*—such as are, in reason, most unlikely to dive into any great mysteries; those who are despised by the wise world, and the great states of it, as poor and base. ‘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; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty,’ I Cor. 1:26, 27. If we have a secret to reveal, we do not choose weak and shallow heads to impart it unto; but here is a mystery which babes understand and wise men are ignorant of: ‘I thank thee, O Father,...because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.’ The people who were so scorned by the proud Pharisees, as those who knew not the law, John 7:49, to them was the gospel revealed, while these doctors of the chair were left in ignorance. It is revealed to the poor many times, and hid from kings and princes. Christ passeth often by palaces to visit the poor cottage. Herod could get nothing from Christ—who out of curiosity so long desired to see him, Luke 23:8; whereas the poor woman of Samaria with a pitcher in her hand, Christ vouchsafeth her a sermon, and opens to her the saving truths of the gospel. Pilate missed of Christ on the bench, while the poor thief finds him, and heaven with him, on the cross. Devout women are passed by and left to perish with their blind zeal, while harlots and publicans are converted by him.

*Fifth.* It is a mystery *in regard of the kind of knowledge the saints themselves have of it.*

1. Their knowledge is but *in part and imperfect.* The most of what they know is the least of what they do not know. The gospel is as a rich piece of arras rolled up; this God hath been unfolding ever since the first promise was made to Adam, opening it still every age wider than other; but the world shall sooner be at an end than this mystery will be fully known. Indeed, as a river—which may be breaks forth at first from the small orifice of a little spring—does widens its channel and grows broader as it approacheth nearer the sea; so the knowledge of this mystery doth spread every age more than other, and still will, as the world draws nearer and nearer to the sea of eternity, into which it must at last fall. The gospel appeared but a little spring in Adam’s time, whose whole Bible was bound up in a single promise; this increased to a rivulet enlarged itself into a river in the days of the prophets; but when Christ came in the flesh then knowledge flowed in amain. The least in the gospel state is said to be greater than the greatest before Christ. So that, in comparison of the darker times of the law, the knowledge Christians now have is great, but compared with the knowledge they shall have in heaven, it is little, and but peep of day.

2. It is *mysterious and dark.* Gospel truths are not known in their native glory and beauty, but in shadows. We are said indeed ‘with open face’ to ‘behold the glory

of God,' but still it is 'as in a glass.' Now, you know the glass presents us with the image, not with the face itself. We do not see them as indeed they are, but as our weak eyes can bear the knowledge of them. Indeed this glass of the gospel is clearer than that of the law was; we see truths through a thinner veil; baptism is clearer than circumcision, the Lord's supper than the passover; in a word, the New Testament than the Old; yet there is nothing of heaven revealed in the gospel but it is translated into our earthly language, because we are unable while here below to understand its original. Who knows, or can conceive, what the joys of heaven are, so as to speak of them in their own idiom and propriety? But, a feast we know, what a kingdom is we understand; with riches and treasures we are well acquainted. Now, heaven is set out by these things, which in this world bear the greatest price in men's thoughts. In heaven is a feast, yet without meat; riches, without money; a kingdom, without robes, sceptre, and crown, because infinitely above these. Hence it is said, 'It doth not yet appear what we shall be,' I John 3:2. Our apprehensions of these things are manly compared with those under the law, but childish compared with the knowledge which glorified saints have. Therefore, as Paul saith 'he putteth childish things away,' when he grew up into further knowledge of the gospel; so he tells us of an imperfect knowledge, which yet he had, 'that must be done away, when that which is perfect is come,' I Cor. 13:10, 11.

*Sixth.* The gospel is a mystery *in regard of the contrary operation it hath upon the hearts of men.* The eyes of some it opens, others it blinds; and who so blind as those whose eyes are put out with light? Some when they hear the gospel are 'pricked in their hearts;' they can hardly stay till the preacher hath done his sermon, but cry out, 'What shall I do to be saved?' Others are hardened by it, and their consciences seared into a greater stupidity. At Paul's sermon, Acts 17:32, 'some mocked;' others were affected so with his discourse that they desired to 'hear it again.' What a mysterious doctrine is this, that sets one a laughing, another a weeping!—that is the savour of life to some, and of death to others!

*Seventh.* The gospel is a mystery *in regard of those rare and strange effects it hath upon the godly;* and that both in respect of their judgments and practice. As the gospel is 'a mystery of faith,' so it enables them to *believe* strange mysteries—to believe that which they understand not, and hope for that which they do not see. It enables them to believe three to be one, and one to be three; a trinity of Persons in the Deity, and a unity of essence; a Father not older than his Son, a Son not inferior to his Father; a Holy Spirit proceeding from both, yet equal to both. It teaches them to believe that Christ was born in time, and that he was from everlasting; that he was comprehended within the virgin's womb, and yet the heaven of heavens not able to contain him; to be the son of Mary, and yet *her* maker that was his mother; to be born without sin, and yet justly to have died for sin. They believe that God was just in punishing Christ though innocent, and in justifying penitent believers who are sinners; they believe themselves to be great sinners, and yet that God sees them in Christ 'without spot or wrinkle.'

Again, as the gospel is a *'mystery of godliness,'* it enables Christians to *do* as strange things as they believe—to live by another's Spirit, to act from another's strength, to live to another's will, and aim at another's glory. They live by the Spirit of Christ, act with his strength, are determined by his will, and aim at his glory. It makes them so meek and gentle that a child may lead them to anything that is good, yet so stout that fire and faggot shall not fright them into a sin. They can love their enemies, and yet, for Christ's sake, can hate father and mother. It makes them diligent in their worldly calling, yet enables them to contemn the riches they have got by God's blessing on their labour; they are taught by it that all things are theirs, yet they dare not take a penny, a pin, from the wicked of the world by force and rapine. It makes them so humble as to 'prefer every one in honour' above themselves, yet so to value their own condition that the poorest among them would not change his estate with the greatest monarch of the world. It makes them thank God for health, and for sickness also; to rejoice when exalted, and as much when made low; they can pray for life, and at the same time desire to die. Is not that doctrine a mystery which fills the Christian's life with so many riddles!

#### USE OR APPLICATION.

*[Why the gospel and its professors are so slighted, misunderstood, and persecuted.]*

*Use First.* This gives us a reason *why the gospel, with the great offers it makes, is so slighted and rejected by the wicked world.* The cause is, the blessings of the gospel are a mystery, and offered in such a way that carnal hearts skill <sup>[2]</sup> not of them, and therefore care not for them. The things it propounds are such as they like well enough, might they have them in a way suited to their carnal apprehensions. The gospel offers riches and honours; who are not taken with these? The gospel opens a mine of unsearchable riches, but in a mystery; it shows them a way how to be 'rich in faith,' 'rich to God,' rich for another world, while poor in this. Our Saviour went about to learn the young man in the gospel the way to be rich—not by purchasing more land, but by selling what he had; but he would not follow his counsel. The gospel offers pleasures and delights—and these the sensual world like well enough—but, alas! they please not their carnal coarse palate, because they are pleasures in a mystery, pleasures in mourning for sin, and mortifying of sin, not pleasures in satisfying them; pleasures in communion with Christ at an ordinance, not with a knot of good fellows over a pot at an ale-house; pleasures to the eye and palate of faith, not of sense; to feed their souls, not pamper and fat their bellies. In a word, the gospel makes discovery of high and choice notions. Surely now those who are the more sober part of the world, bookish men, and in love with good literature, whose souls

crave intellectual food, and prize a lecture more than a feast, these will be highly pleased with the truths the gospel brings to light, being such rare mysteries that they can find in no other book. Yet, alas! we see that the gospel doth as little please this sort and rank of men as any other. Had it been filled with flowers of rhetoric, chemical experiments, philosophical notions, or maxims of policy, O how greedily would they have embraced it! But it is wisdom in a mystery. 'We speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought,' I Cor. 2:6. Bradwardine, a great scholar, before he was meekened by the grace of the gospel, slighted Paul's epistles, as afterward he confessed, because he did not express *ingenium metaphysicum*—a metaphysical head in his discourses.

Again, we here have the reason why the gospel and its professors are not only slighted, but hated and persecuted. For the gospel, it is a mystery, which the world knows not; and therefore opposed by it. Ignorance is the mother of persecution: 'Father, forgive them, they know not what they do!' The greatest enemies the gospel ever had were not the sensual and open profane—though these bad enough—but the superstitious and ignorantly devout, these have been they who have shown most fierceness and fury against the gospel. Paul tells of the 'devout' persons that cruelly persecuted him, Acts 13:50. None more hot against the truth than Paul himself, who was a strict Pharisee, but bloody enemy against the truth. What reason then have we to pray for the increase of gospel light! The more the gospel is known, the more kindly will it be entertained.

Again, the professors of the gospel, why are they so hated and maligned, but because they partake of the mysterious nature of the gospel, and therefore their worth is not known? They are high-born, but in a mystery; you cannot see their birth by their outward breeding—the arms they bear, revenues they have to live on, by which the world judges the greatness of persons and families. No, their outside is mean, while their inside is glorious; and the world values them by what they know and see of their external port, and not by their inward graces. They pass, as a prince in disguise of some poor man's clothes, through the world, and their entertainment is accordingly. Had Christ put on his robes of glory and majesty when he came into the world, surely he had not gone out of it with so shameful and cruel a death; the world would have trembled at his footstool, which we see some of them did when but a beam of his deity looked forth upon them. Did saints walk on earth in those robes which they shall wear in heaven, then they would be feared and admired by those who now scorn and despise them. But, as God should not have had his design in Christ's first coming had he so appeared, so neither would he in his saints, did the world know them, as one day they shall; therefore he is pleased to let them lie hid under the mean coverings of poverty and other infirmities, that so he may exercise their suffering graces, and also accomplish his wrath upon the wicked for theirs against them.

The gospel as a mystery shows us the reason why carnal men do so bungle when they meddle with matters of religion. Let them speak of gospel truths —what

ignorance do they show! Even as a countryman chops logic, and speaks of the liberal arts, so they of heavenly matters. Do we not see that those who in worldly affairs will give you a wise and solid answer, in the truths of the gospel they speak like children and babes? Yea, even those that have some brain-knowledge of the Scriptures, how dry and unsavoury is their discourse of spiritual things! They are like a parable in a fool's mouth. So, when they engage in any duty of religion. Put them to pray, hear the word, or meditate upon what they have heard; you had as good give a workman's tools to him that was never of the trade. They know not how to handle them; they go ungainsomely about the work, and cut all into chips. Every trade hath its mystery, and religion above all callings, when none but those that are instructed in know how to manage.

*[Several duties which the mysterious nature  
of the gospel imposes on believers.]*

*Use Second.* Several duties *pressed upon the saints*, who are instructed in the mystery of the gospel, by way of exhortation.

1. *Duty.* Be *thankful that ever God revealed it to thee.* O what a mercy this is, that thou hast 'life and immortality brought to light,' that thy ears hear this joyful sound! Never came such joyful news to town as the gospel brings. What a poor nation was this of ours before the gospel day broke among us! Bless God thy lot is cast where this sun is up. The gospel indeed was early preached in the world. Adam had it soon after his fall; but a short gospel, a mystery, indeed, to him, wrapped all up in one promise, and that a dark one. But now that one wedge of gold is beaten out into the whole Bible—a gospel written at length, and not in figures. You hear the gospel not preached in law terms, as the Jews did under Moses' pedagogy; but gospel in gospel language. The veil is taken off which hid the beauty of gospel truths from their face. You hear it after it hath been rescued out of Antichrist's hands, by whom for many ages it was kept prisoner. You live not in those dark times when gospel truths were embased with the mean alloy of schoolmen's subtleties and superstitious vanities —when more stones were given to break the teeth, than bread to feed the souls, of people. The conduit of the gospel now runs with wine, not twice or thrice a year, on some gaudy festival day, but constantly. Every Sabbath-day you have your fill of its sweetest truths. Were it not sad, if they should be found to have been more thankful for the little drawing of gospel light which then but peeped forth, than you for its meridian light, who live to see the Sun of righteousness with his healing wings spread forth upon you? But especially bless God for any inward light and life thou hast received from this gospel. God hath done more for thee in this, than for thousands thou livest among, and those no means ones either. To this day God hath not given thy carnal neighbours eyes to see, nor hearts to perceive, that mystery which is unfolded unto thee. Are you thankful to him that hath taught your worldly trade, by which you pick a small livelihood for your body? O what praise then dost thou owe

to thy God, who, by instructing thee in this mystery, hath learned thee as art for saving thy soul! Trumpeters delight to sound where they have the best echo; God delights to give his mercy to those that will most resound his praise.

2. *Duty*. The gospel is a mystery, therefore *rest not in thy present attainments*; either in thy knowledge, as it is a mystery of faith, or thy practice, as it is a mystery of godliness.

(1.) *Rest not in thy present knowledge*. It is like thou knowest much to what once thou didst; but thou knowest little to what thou mayest. Some books are learned at once reading, but the gospel is a mystery that will take up more than thy lifetime to understand it. Mysteries are here sown thick; thou diggest where the springs rise faster upon thee the further thou goest. God tells not all his secrets at once—‘here a little, and there a little;’ ‘many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased,’ Dan. 12:4. The merchant’s ship takes not all in her lading at one port, but sails from one to another for it; neither doth the Christian enrich himself with this heavenly treasure all at one time or in one ordinance. The true lover of learning gives not over his chase and pursuit for a little smattering knowledge he gets, but rather, having got the scent how sweet learning is, puts on with fuller cry for what he wants. The true doctor studies harder than the freshman, because, as he knows more of learning, so by that knowledge he understands his own deficiency better; for the higher he ascends the hill of learning, the more his prospect enlargeth, while the other, standing at the bottom, thinks he knows all in his little.

(2.) *Rest not in thy present practice*, as it is a mystery of godliness. Let not a little grace serve thy turn, when thou mayest have more; which that you may do,

(a) Compare not thyself with those that have less than thyself, but look on those that have far exceeded thee. To look on our inferiors occasions pride, ‘I am not this publican,’ saith the Pharisee; but look on other more eminent than ourselves will both preserve humility, and be a spur to diligence. Miltiades’ victories would not suffer Themistocles, then a young man, to sleep. The progress that some have made in grace—didst thou but keep them in thine eye—would not suffer thee to be quiet, who art now lagging so far behind, till thou hast overtaken them. May be thou hast got some victory over thy passion, and art not such a bedlam in thy fury as others; but didst thou never hear how meek a man Moses was, that could bear the murmurings of the multitude, yea envy of his brother and sister, and yet his heart not take fire? Thou hast some good affections towards God, but how far short of holy David’s zeal, whose heart did run out to God as soon as his eyes were open in the morning? ‘When I awake I am still with thee.’ Thrice a day, yea seven times a day, he would praise his God. Thou hast some patience, but hast thou learned to write after Job’s copy? Thou art not without faith, but art thou like Abraham—strong in faith to follow God when thou knowest not whither he will lead thee?

(b) The grace thou hast will soon be less, if thou addest not more to it. Thou art upon a swift stream; let thy oar miss its stroke, and thou fallest backward. There is not such a thing in religion as a saving trade of godliness. Some men in their worldly

trade can say at the year's end they have neither got nor lost; but *thou* canst not say thus at the day's end. Thou art at night better or worse than thou wert in the morning.

(c) It is the design of the gospel to give grace in great measures. Christ gives life, 'and that more abundantly,' John 10:10. Now shall the fountain be so large, and the pitcher we carry to it so little? Wherefore doth God open his hand to such a breadth in the promise, but to widen our desires and encourage our endeavours?

(d) The more grace thou hast got, the easier it will be to add to it. A little learning with more difficulty by a young scholar, than a great deal more afterwards.

3. *Duty. Bear with one another's imperfections.* You see the gospel is a mystery, do not wonder therefore that any are not presently masters of their art. Christ bears with the saints' imperfections; well may the saints one with another. How raw were the disciples in their knowledge—how long did they stand at one lesson before they could learn it! 'Do you now believe?' says Christ, John 16:31. He had borne with them long, and inculcated the same thing often, before it entered their minds; yet, alas! we can hardly have a good opinion of, or hold communion with, those that are not every way of our judgment, and cannot see things so clear as ourselves. Surely we mistake the nature of the gospel, as if there were none but plain points in it. Blessed be God, as to the principles necessary to salvation, though their nature be high and mysterious, yet they are clearly and plainly asserted in the word. 'Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness,' I Tim. 3:16. Godliness is a mystery, but it is 'without controversy.' As to the main fundamental points and practices of it there is no dispute among the faithful; but there are some points more remote from the vital parts of religion that have knots not easily untied, which makes some difference of judgment. But it is not every excess or defect makes a monster—as six or four fingers on the hand—but an excess or defect in some principal part; neither doth every mistake make a monster in religion. Remember that the gospel is a mystery, and you will bear with one another's ignorance the better. And, when love hath once laid the dust which passion and prejudice hath blown into our eyes, we shall then stand at greater advantage for finding out truth.

Again, bear with weaknesses in the practical part of religion. Godliness, as well as the doctrine of our faith, is a mystery. All the servants in a shop cannot work alike. Some bungle at more than other—as their parts and experience are less. All saints are not of a height. Christ hath some children in his family that are led with strings, as well as others that go strongly without such help. Some act more upon pure gospel principle—love, and a spirit of adoption; others have not yet worn off their legal fears and terrors. Some are got higher up the hill of faith, and have clearer apprehensions of their spiritual state; others are nearer the bottom, who, as the sun newly risen above the horizon, are wrapped up with many clouds of perplexing fears and doubts. In a word, some are got further out of their passions, have greater mastery over their corruptions, than other of their brethren. Pity thy weak brother, and take him by the hand for his help; but despise him not, God can make even him stand, and suffer thee to fall. Christ doth not quench the smoking flax, why should

we? The weak Christian is welcome to his heavenly Father, as well as the strong; why should he not be so to his brethren? But, alas! the proverb here is too true, 'Better speak to the master than the man; the father, than the child.' Those that can be so bold with God, dare not be free with their fellow-servants and brethren.

4. *Duty.* Is the gospel a mystery? Then Christian, *long for heaven*; there, and only there, shall this mystery be fully known. The great things which were spoken concerning the gospel church made many saints and prophets before Christ's time desire to see those happy times wherein such revelations should be made; how much more should we long for heaven, where this great mystery shall be fully opened, and every box of this cabinet unlocked, in which lie so many precious jewels to this day unseen by any saint on earth! Then it will be said, 'The mystery of God is finished,' Rev. 10:7. Here we learn our knowledge of it by little and little, like one that reads a book as it comes from the press, sheet by sheet; there we shall see it altogether. Here we get a little light from this sermon, a little more from the next, and thus our stock increases by the addition of a few pence thrown in, some to-day, and more to-morrow; but there we shall have all at once. Here we learn with much pain and difficulty; there without travail and trouble. Glorified saints, though they cease not from work, yet rest from labour. Here passion blinds our minds, that we mistake error for truth and truth for error; but then these clouds shall be scattered and gone. Here the weakness of natural parts keeps many in the dark, and renders them incapable of apprehending some truths, which other of their brethren are led into; but there the strong shall not prevent the weak, the scholar shall know as much as his master, the people as their minister. Here the squabbles and contentions among the godly do leave the weaker sort at great uncertainty what to think concerning many truths; but there they shall all agree—which comforted that holy man on his death-bed, that he was going thither where Luther and Calvin were reconciled. Here we are disturbed in our inquiries after truth—one while the necessary occasions of this world divert us, another while the weakness and infirmities of our bodies hinder us; but in heaven our bodies will call for none of this tending, we shall need provide neither raiment for the back nor food for the belly.

O happy death, that will ease us of all the aches of our bodies and conflicts in our souls! Thou art the only physician to cure all the saints' distempers in both. When that blessed hour comes, then lift up your heads with joy, for it will lead you into that blissful place where you shall see Christ, not a great way off, with the eye of faith in the optic glass of an ordinance or promise, but, with a glorified eye, behold his very person, never more to lose the sight of him. Thou shalt not taste his love in a little morsel of sacramental bread and sip of wine, but lay thy mouth to the fountain, and from his bosom drink thy full draught. Thou shalt no more hear what a glorious place heaven is, as thou wert wont to have it set forth by the sorry rhetoric of a mortal man preaching to thee of that with which himself was but little acquainted; but shalt walk thyself in the streets of that glorious city, and bless thyself when thou art there, to think what poor low thoughts thou and thy minister also had thereof,

when on earth thou didst meditate, and he did preach, on this subject. One moment's sight of that glory will inform thee more than all the comments and books written of it were ever able to do. And dost thou not yet cry out, How long will it be, O Lord, most holy and true, before thou bringest me thither? Is not every hour a day, day a month, month a year, yea age, till that time comes? As Bernard, upon those words, 'A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me,' John 16:16, passionately breaks forth—*pie Domine, modicum illud vocas, in quo te non videam? O modicum, modicum longum*—holy Lord, dost thou call that a little while in which I shall not see thee? O this little is a long little while!

[*Exhortation to study the mystery of the gospel.*]

*Use Third.* Be you provoked, who are yet *strangers to this mystery, to get the knowledge of it*—yea, endeavour to gain an intimate acquaintance with it. To move you thereunto, I shall make use of the TWO ARGUMENTS: 1. Consider the Author of this mystery. 2. The subject-matter of it.

1. *Argument.* Consider *the Author of the mystery of the gospel.* That book must needs be worth the reading which hath God for the author; that mystery deserves our knowledge which is the product of his infinite wisdom and love. There is a divine glory sitting upon the face of all God's works. It is impossible so excellent an artist should put his hand to an ignoble work. 'O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all,' Ps. 104:24. But there is not the same glory to be seen in all his works. Our apostle tells us 'there is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon; one star differs from another in glory.' Now, among all the works of God that of man's redemption may well pass for the master-piece. The world itself was set up to be a stage for the acting of this piece of providence, wherein B@8LB@\648@H F@N\" J@Ø 1,@Ø—'the manifold wisdom of God,' is so curiously wrought, that angels themselves pry into it, and are wrapped up into an admiration of it, Eph. 3:10; I Peter 1:12. God's works deserve our study, and those most wherein he hath drawn the clearest portraiture of himself. The gospel mystery therefore, above all other, should be searched into by us, being the only glass in which the glory of God is with open face to be seen.

2. *Argument.* Consider *the subject-matter of the gospel*—Christ, and the way of salvation through him. What poor and low ends have all worldly mysteries! one to make us rich, another to make us great and honourable in the world, but none to make us holy here or happy hereafter;—this is learned only from the knowledge of Christ, who is revealed in the gospel, and nowhere else. No doubt Solomon's natural history, in which he treated 'of all trees from the cedar to the hyssop, of all beasts, fowls, and creeping things,' was a rare piece in its kind; yet one leaf of the gospel is infinitely more worth to us than all that large volume would have been;—so much more precious, by how much the knowledge of God in Christ is better than the knowledge of beasts and birds. And we have reason to think it a mercy that the book is lost and

laid out of our sight, which we should have been prone to have studied more than the Bible; not that it was better, but more suitable to the mould of our carnal minds. But, to a gracious soul, enlightened with saving knowledge, no book to this of the Bible. Paul was a bred scholar; he wanted not that learning which commends men to the world, yet counts all dung and dog's meat in comparison of 'the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ his Lord,' Php. 3:8. Well might he call it dog's meat; for a man may feed all his lifetime on human learning, and die, in Scripture sense, a dog at last. It was the saying of Bonaventure, that he had rather lose all his philosophy than one article of his faith. We read that those, Acts 19, were no sooner converted but they burned their books of curious arts. Neither were they losers by it; for they had got acquaintance with one book that was worth them all.

Of all creatures in this visible world, light is the most glorious; of all light, the light of the sun without compare excels the rest. Were this eye of the world put out, the earth would be a grot, a grave, in which we should be buried alive. What were the Egyptians while under the plague of darkness but like so many dead men? they had friends, but could not see them; estates abroad in the fields, but could not enjoy them. Now what is the sun to the sensible world, that is Christ in the gospel to the intellectual world of souls. Without this 'light of the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ,' what can the soul do or enjoy aright? Man's soul is of high, yea royal extraction, for God is 'the Father of spirits;' but this child meets his heavenly Father in the dark, and knows him not: 'He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not,' John 1:10. And as it is of high birth, so intended for a high end, to glorify and enjoy God its Maker. Now, for want of the knowledge of Christ it can do neither, but debaseth itself to the drudgery of sin and sensual embraces of the creature instead of God, for whom it was at first made; like the son of some great prince, who, not knowing his royal descent, casts himself away in marriage on some beggar's daughter. O how should we prize and study this mystery therefore that brings us to the true knowledge of God, and the way how we may recover our interest in him and happiness with him! Man's primitive happiness consisted in God's love to him and his likeness to God. The gospel discovers a way how man may be restored to both. The first it doth, as it is a mystery of faith, by revealing Christ and his atonement for our reconciliation with God; the latter, as it is a mystery of godliness, and the instrument with Christ useth in the hand of his Spirit to create man anew, and as it were the tool to re-engrave the image of God upon him with.

*Question.* But *how may we be led into the saving knowledge of this mystery?*

(1.) Think not how to obtain it *by the strength of thy reason or natural parts*. It is not learned as other secrets in nature or human arts, of which those that have the most piercing wit and strongest brain soonest get the mastery. None have been more mistaken, or erred more foully in their apprehensions about gospel truths, than the greatest scholars, sons of reason, and men admired for their parts and learning; the cause whereof may be partly their pride and self-confidence, which God ever was and will be an enemy to; and also because the mysteries of the gospel do not suit and jump

with the principles of carnal reason and wisdom. Whence it comes to pass that the wiser part of the world, as they are counted, have commonly rejected the grand principles of evangelical faith as absurd and irrational. Tell a wise Arian that Christ is God and man in one person, and he laughs at it, as they did at Paul when he mentioned the resurrection of the body, Acts 17:32, because the key of his understanding fits not the wards of this lock. When a merit-monger hears of being justified by faith, and not by works, it will not go down with him. It seems as ridiculous to him that a man should be justified by the righteousness which another fulfills, as for a man to live by the meat another eats, and be warm with the clothes another wears. Tell him, when he hath lived never so holily, he must renounce his own work, and be beholden to another's merit; you shall as soon persuade him to sell his estate, to get his living by begging at another's door. These are 'hard sayings,' at which they take offence, and go away, or labour to pervert the simplicity of gospel revelation to their own sense. Resolve therefore to come, when thou readest the gospel, not to dispute with thy Maker, but to believe what he reveals to be his mind. Call not divine mysteries to give an account to thy shallow understanding. What is this but to try a prince at a subject's bar? When thou hast laid aside the pride of thy reason, then thou art fit to be admitted a scholar in Christ's school, and not till then.

*Objection.* But must we cease to be men when we become Christians?

*Answer.* No; we cease not to be men, but to be proud men, when we lay aside the confidence of our own understanding to acquiesce in the wisdom and truth of God. An implicit faith is absurd and irrational when a man requires it of us, who may deceive or be deceived in what he saith. But when God speaks, it is all the reason in the world we should believe what he saith to be true, though we cannot comprehend what he saith; for we know he who is infinite wisdom cannot himself be deceived, and he who is truth and faithfulness will not deceive us.

(2.) Thou must *become a disciple to Christ*. Men do not teach strangers that pass by their door, or that come into their shops the mystery of their trade and profession; but their servants, and such as are willing to be bound apprentices to them. Neither doth Christ promise to reveal the mysteries of the gospel to any but those that will give up their names to be his servants and disciples: 'Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables,' Mark 4:11. When once thou hast subscribed to the covenant of the gospel, thy indenture is sealed, Christ is now thy master he takes thee for one of his family and charge, and so will look to thy breeding and education; but for those on whose hearts and affections he hath no hold, they come may be to the ordinance, but, when the sermon is done, return to their old master again. Sin is still their trade, and Satan their lord; is it like that Christ should teach them his trade? The mystery of iniquity and of godliness are contrary; the one cannot be learned till the other be unlearned.

(3.) If thou wouldst learn this mystery to any purpose, *content not thyself with a brain-notional knowledge of it*. The gospel hath respect both to the head and heart—

understanding and will. To the understanding it is a mystery of faith; to the heart and life it is a mystery of godliness. Now these two must not be severed: 'Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience,' I Tim. 3:9. Here is both the manna, and a golden pot to keep it in—truth laid up in a pure conscience. Knowledge may make thee a scholar, but not a saint; orthodox, but not gracious. What if thou wert able to write a commentary on all the Bible, and from the Scripture couldst confute all the errors and heresies which were at any time broached and vented against the truth; what would this avail thee, when thy own lusts confute, yea confound, thyself? 'If I understand all mysteries,...and have not charity, I am nothing,' I Cor. 13:2. He that increaseth knowledge, and doth not get grace with his knowledge, increaseth sorrow to himself, yea, eternal sorrow. It would be an ease to gospel sinners in hell if they could rase the remembrance of the gospel out of their memories, and forget that they ever knew such truths. In thy knowledge therefore of gospel mysteries, labour for these two things especially:

(a) To see *thy propriety in them*. Herein lies the pith and marrow of gospel knowledge. When thou findest what Christ hath done and suffered for poor sinners, rest not till thou canst say with Paul 'who loved me, and gave himself for me,' Gal. 2:20. When thou readest any precious promise, thou shouldst ask thy own soul, as the eunuch did Philip concerning that place of Isaiah, 'Is it spoken to me, or of some other?' Am I the pardoned person? Am I one in Christ Jesus, to whom there is no condemnation? How impatient were those two prisoners till Joseph had opened their dream, that they might know what should befall them! The Scripture will resolve you whether your head shall be lift up to the gibbet in hell, or to the king's court in heaven. Now in reading or hearing it preached, this is it thou shouldst listen after and inquire to know—where it lays thee out thy portion, whether in the promise or in the threatening. There is a sweet feast the gospel speaks of, but am I one of Christ's guests that shall sit at it? There are mansions prepared in heaven, but can I find one taken up for me there?

(b) Labour to *find the power and efficacy of gospel truths upon thee*. When our first parents had eaten that unhappy fruit which gave them and all mankind in them their bane, it is said then 'they knew that they were naked;' doubtless they knew it before their fall, but now they knew it with shame; they knew it, and sought for clothes to cover them, of which they found no want before. I only allude to the place. Many know what sin is, but it is not a soul-feeling knowledge: they know they are naked, but are not ashamed for their nakedness; they see no need of Christ's righteousness to cover it, and of his grace to cure it. Many know Christ died, and for what he died; but Christ's death is a dead truth to them, it doth not procure the death of their lusts that were the death of him. They know he is risen, but they lie still themselves rotting in the grave of their corruptions. They know Christ is ascended to heaven, but this draws not their souls after him. A philosopher, being asked what he had got by philosophy, answered, 'It hath learned me to contemn what others adore, and to bear what others cannot endure.' If one should ask, What have you got by

knowing the mystery of the gospel? Truly you can give no account worthy of your acquaintance with it, except you can say, I have learned to believe what flesh and blood could never believe have taught me, and to do what I never could, till I had acquaintance with its heavenly truths. This is to know 'the truth as it is in Jesus,' Eph. 4:21. Had a sick man drunk some potion—which if it works will save his life, if not, will certainly be his death—O how troubled would he be while [until] he sees some operation it hath upon him! what means would he not use to set it awork! If gospel truths work not effectually on thee for thy renovation and sanctification, thou art a lost man; they will undoubtedly be 'a savour of death' to thee. O how can you then rest till you find them transforming your hearts and assimilating your lives to their heavenly nature! Thus Paul endeavoured to know the power of Christ's resurrection quickening him to a holy life here, without which he could not attain to a joyful resurrection hereafter, Php. 3:10, 11. The gospel is a glass, but not like that in which we see our bodily face. This only shows what our feature is, and leaves it as it was; but that changeth the very complexion of the soul 'from glory to glory,' II Cor. 3:18.

*[The minister's duty to make known the gospel.]*

SECOND OBSERVABLE. Wherein lies the *work* of a gospel minister—'to make known the mystery of the gospel.' You have had the sublime nature of the gospel set forth: it is a mystery. Here the minister's work is laid out; he is with all possible clearness and perspicuity to open this mystery and expose it to the view of the people. Mark, 'the gospel' is his subject, and 'to make it known' is his duty. So runs the minister's commission for his office, 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature,' Mark 16:15. We hear people sometimes saying, The preacher is beside his text; but he is never beside his errand so long as it is the gospel he makes known. Whatever is his text, this is to be his design. His commission is to make known the gospel; to deliver that therefore which is not reductive to this is beside his instructions. Nothing but the preaching of the gospel can reach the end for which the gospel ministry was appointed, and that is the salvation of souls, 'After that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe,' I Cor. 1:21. The great book of the creation had lain long enough open before the world's eyes, yet could they never come to the saving knowledge of God, by all that divine wisdom which is written with the finger of God in every page thereof. Therefore it pleased God to send his servants, that by preaching the gospel, poor souls might believe on Christ, and believing might be saved. No doctrine but the gospel can save a soul; nor the gospel itself, except it be made known.

*[The gospel alone can save a soul,  
and this only when known.]*

*First.* No doctrine but the gospel *can save a soul*. Galen may learn you to save your health if you will follow his rules. Littleton and other law-books will teach you how to save your estates. Plato and other philosophers will learn you how to save your credits among men, by an outward just inoffensive life. Their doctrine will be a means to save you from many nasty and gross sins, by which you may be applauded by your neighbours on earth, and perhaps less tormented in hell, where Fabricius finds a cooler place than Cataline. But it is the gospel alone whereby you can be taught how to save your souls from hell and bring them to heaven. But what do I speak of these? It is not God's own law—the moral, I mean—that is now able to save you. God would never have been at such a vast expense—in the bloodshed of his Son—to erect another law, viz. the law of faith, if that would have served for this purpose; Gal. 2:21, 'for if righteousness come'—yea, or could come—'by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.'

*Question.* Why then do ministers preach the law?

*Answer.* They preach it as they should, they preach it *in subserviency to the gospel, not in opposition*. *Qui scit benè distinguere inter legem et evangelium, Deo gratias agat, et sciat se esse theologum*—he that knows how to distinguish well between the law and the gospel, let him bless God, and know that he then deserves the name of a divine. We must preach it as a rule, not as a covenant, of life. Holiness, as to the matter and substance of it, is the same that ever it was. The gospel destroys not the law in this sense, but adds a strong enforcement to all its commands.

Again, we may and must preach the law as the necessary means to drive souls out of themselves to Christ in the gospel. The gospel is the net with which we should catch souls and draw them out of their sinning sinking state. But how shall we ever get them to come into it? Truly never. Except we first beat the river with the law's clubs—threatenings, I mean—sinners lie in their lusts, as fish in the mud, out of which there is no getting them but by laying hard upon their consciences with the threatenings of the law. 'Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound,' Rom. 5:20; that is, in the conscience by conviction, not in life by commission and practice. The law shows both what is sin, and also what sin is. I mean it tells when we commit a sin, and what a hateful and dangerous thing we do in committing of it—how we alarm God, and bring him with all his strength into the field against us. Now this is necessary to prepare a way for the sinner's entertaining the gospel. The needle must enter before the thread with which the cloth is sewed. The sharp point of the law must prick the conscience before the creature can by the promises of the gospel be drawn to Christ. The field is not fit for the seed to be cast into it till the plough hath broken it up. Nor is the soul prepared to receive the mercy of the gospel till broken with the terrors of the law.

*Second.* The gospel itself saves not, *except it be made known*. 'If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost,' II Cor. 4:3. Where God sends no light, he intends no love. In bodily sickness a physician may make a cure, though his patient knows not what the medicine is that he useth. But the soul must know its remedy before he can

have any healing benefit from it. John is sent 'to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins,' Luke 1:77. No knowledge, no remission. Christ must be lift up on the pole of the gospel, as well as on the tree of the cross, that by an eye of faith we may look on him, and so be healed, John 3:14<sup>[3]</sup>. 'Look unto me, and be ye saved,' Isa. 45:22. A man that sees may lead another that is bodily blind to the place he would go. But he that would go to heaven must have an eye in his own head to see his way, or else he will never come there. 'The just shall live by his faith,' Hab. 2:4, not by another's. A proxy faith is bootless. Now saving faith is a grace that sees her object; it is 'the evidence of things not seen,' Heb. 11:1; that is, which are not seen by sense. 'I know,' saith Paul, 'whom I have believed,' II Tim. 1:12. Therefore faith is oft set out by knowledge: 'And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent,' John 17:3. Now, how can they know Christ and life eternal, till the gospel be made known, which bringeth him and life by him to light? II Tim. 1:10. And by whom shall the gospel be made known if not by the ministers of it? Thus far the apostle drives it: 'How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?' Rom. 10:14. So that this great work lies at the minister's door. He is to 'make known the mystery of the gospel.'

*Objection.* But what need now of preaching? this was the work of those that were to plant a church. Now the church is planted and the gospel made known, this labour may be spared.

*Answer.* The ministry of the gospel was not intended *only to plant a church, but to carry on its growth also.* What Paul plants, Apollos comes after and waters with his ministry, I Cor. 3:6. When the foundation is laid, must not the house be built? And this Christ gave ministers to his church for, 'For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,' Eph. 4:12. The scaffold is not taken down till the building be finished, but rather to raised higher and higher as the fabric goes up. Thus Paul went on in his ministry from lower points to higher, from foundation to superstructory truths, Heb 6:1. A famous church was planted at Thessalonica, but there was something 'lacking in their faith,' which Paul longed to come and carry on to further perfection I Thes. 3:10. Surely they that think there is so little need of preaching, forget that the gospel is a mystery—such a mystery as can never be fully taught by the minister or learned by the people; neither do they consider how many engineers Satan hath at work continually to undermine the gospel, both as it is a mystery of faith and godliness also. Hath not he his seedsmen that are always scattering corrupt doctrine? Surely then the faithful minister had need obviate their designs by making known the truth, that his people may not want an antidote to fortify them against their poison. Are their not corruptions in the bosoms of the best, and daily temptations from Satan and the world to draw these forth, whereby they are always in danger, and oft sadly foiled? In a word, is not grace planted in a cold soil, that needs cherishing from a gospel ministry? Do we not see, that what is got in one Sabbath by the preaching of the word, is, if not lost, yet much

impaired, by the next? Truly our hearts are like lean ground, that needs ever and anon a shower or else the corn on it withers and changeth its hue. O what barren heaths would the most flourishing churches soon prove if these clouds did not drop upon them! The Christians to whom Peter wrote were of a high form, no novices, but well grounded and rooted in the faith; yet this did not spare the apostle his further pains: 'I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth,' II Peter 1:12.

#### USE OR APPLICATION.

*[Reproof and encouragement to ministers.]*

*Use First. To the ministers.* To reprove some; for encouragement to others. It reproveth,

1. The *vainglorious preachers*; that, instead of 'making known the mystery of the gospel,' makes it his errand into the pulpit to make himself known; who blows up his sermon, as butchers do their flesh they sell, with a windy pomp of words, and frames their discourse rather to tickle their ears, than to profit their souls; to send them home applauding the preacher for his wit and parts, rather than admiring the excellencies of Christ and riches of his grace. Thus many, alas! who should be factors for Christ, play the merchants for their own credit. They are sent to woo souls for Christ, and they speak one word for him and two for themselves. This is a great wickedness, which blessed Paul solemnly clears himself of, 'Nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness: nor of men sought we glory, I Thes. 2:5, 6. O how seldom are any converted by such sermons! These *gloriæ animalia*—vainglorious preachers, they may be, like Rachel, fair, but their ministry is like to be barren.

2. *Abstruse preachers*; who do not make the mysteries of the gospel known, but make truths plain in themselves mysterious by their dark perplexed discourses upon them. This was the unhappiness of the schoolmen, that ruffled and ensnarled the plainest truths of the gospel with their harsh terms and nice questions, which else might have been wound off by an ordinary understanding. What is said of some commentators, 'The places on which they treat were plain till they expounded them,' may be said of some preachers, their text was clear till their obscure discourse upon it darkened it. What greater wrong can a preacher do his hearers than this? The preacher is to open scriptures; but these turn the key the wrong way, and lock the up from their knowledge. They are to hold up the gospel glass before their people, whereby they may see to dress their souls, like a bride, against their husband's coming; but by that time that they have breathed on their text, it is so obscured that they cannot see their face in it. That water is not the deepest that is thickest and muddy; nor the matter always the most profound when the preacher's expression is

dark and obscure. We count it a blemish in speech, when a man's pronunciation is not distinct. I know not then how it should come to be thought a perfection to be obscure in the delivery of our conceptions. The deeper and fuller the sculpture in the seal is, the clearer the impression will be on the wax. The more fully any man understands a thing, the more able he will be to deliver it plainly to others. As a clipped stammering speech comes from an impediment in the instruments of speech, so a dark and obscure delivery of our thoughts bewrays a defect in our apprehensions; except it should come from an affectation of soaring high in our expressions above the reach of vulgar understandings—and this is worst of all.

3. The mere *moral preacher*; the stream of whose preaching runs not in an evangelical channel. Moral duties he presseth, and sins against the moral law he exclaims against. Neither dare I blame him for that. The Christian's creed doth not vacate the ten commandments. One of the first sermons our Saviour preached was most of it spent in pressing moral duties Matt. 5. And never more need to drive this nail to the head than in our days, in which Christianity hath been so wounded in its reputation by the moral dishonesty of many of its professors. But I level my reproof against them for this, that they do not preach the law evangelically, and make that the main design of their ministry for which they received their commission, and that is, 'to make known the mystery of the gospel'—'to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ,' Eph. 3:8, 9. Did it make the father undervalue Cicero's works—which otherwise he admired for their eloquence—only because his leaves were not perfumed with the sweet name of Jesus Christ? Surely then it is a foul blot upon their sermons and labours, who reveal little of Christ and the mystery of the gospel through the whole course of their ministry. The woe is pronounced not only against the non-preaching minister, but the not-gospel-preaching minister also: 'Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel,' I Cor. 9:16. An ethic lecture will not make thy people 'wise unto salvation.' It were well if thou couldst preach thy drunken neighbour sober and the riotous temperate. But this is no more than Plato did for his Polemo. This may make them men that were before beasts; but thou must get them to be saints, regenerate ones; preach them out of themselves, as well as out of their flagitious practices; from the confidence of their righteousness, as well as from the love of their sins; or else thou leavest them short of heaven. Well then, smoke, yea fire, them out of their moral wickednesses, by the threatenings of the law; but rest not till thou hast acquainted them with Christ, and the way of salvation by him. In a word, preach moral duties as much as thou wilt, but in an evangelical strain. Convince them they cannot do these without grace from Christ, for want of which the heathens' virtues were but *splendida peccata*—gilded vices. *Per fidem venit ad opera, non per opera venit ad fidem*—we must come to good works by faith, and not to faith by good works. The tree must be good before the fruit it bears can be so. 'Without me ye can do nothing.' And then convince them, when they are most exact in moral duties, that this

must not be their righteousness before God; the robe which they must cover their souls with—if they would not be found naked in his sight—must not be the homespun garment of their own inherent righteousness wrought in them, but of Christ's righteousness which he wrought for them.

It affords a word of *sweet encouragement to the faithful ministers of Christ*. Haply you have been long at work for Christ, and see little fruit of your labours; your strength is even spent, and candle almost at the socket of old age; but your people are still carnal and obstinate, no sun will tan them, no arguments move them, filthy they are, and so will continue; to hell they will go, no gate can stop them; thou hast done thy utmost to reclaim them, but all in vain. This is sad indeed—to them, I mean—thus to go to hell by broad daylight, while the gospel shows the whither every step of their sinful course leads them. But thou hast cause of much inward peace and comfort, that thou hast done what God expects at thy hands. Remember thy work is, 'To make known the mystery of the gospel,' and upon their peril be it if they embrace it not. God never laid it upon thee to convert those he sends thee to. No; to publish the gospel is thy duty, to receive it is theirs. Abraham promiseth to discharge his servant of his oath, if the woman which he was to woo for his son would not follow him; and so will God clear thee of their blood, and lay it at their own door. 'If thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness,...he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul,' Eze. 3:19. God judgeth not of his servants' work by the success of their labour, but by their faithfulness to deliver his message. 'Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord,' Isa. 49:5.

[*The duty of the people to make known the gospel.*]

*Use Second. To the people.* As it is the minister's task to make known the mystery of the gospel in his pulpit, so your duty to do the same in your lives. The Christian's life should put his minister's sermon in print; he should preach that mystery every day to the eyes of his neighbours, which the minister preacheth once or twice a week to their ears. As a true-made dial agrees with the sun in its motion, and as a well-drawn picture resembles the face from which it was taken, so should thy conversation resemble that gospel which thou professest. Let none have cause to say, what once did of some loose Christians, *aut hoc non est evangelium, aut hi non sunt evangelici*—either this is not the gospel, or these are not its subjects. What hast thou to do with any sordid and impure practices, who pretendest to be instructed in this high and holy mystery? Thy Christian name ill agrees with a heathen life. If thou sufferest any that is not of thy profession to outstrip thee, yea but to keep pace with thee, in any action that is virtuous and truly honourable, thou shamest thyself and the gospel also. What a shame were it to find one in some trivial country school that should be able to pose a graduate in the university! Thou art trained up in such high and heavenly learning as no other religion in the world can show, and therefore your lives are to bear proportion to your teaching. It was a sharp reproof to the Corinthian

saints, when the apostle said, 6"Jz -<2DTB@< B,D4B"J,ÄJ,—‘ye walk as men,’ I Cor. 3:3; that is, men in a natural state. And he that walks thus like men, will not walk much unlike the very beasts; for man is become brutish in his understanding, and it is worse to live like a beast than to be a beast.

Surely, Christians, if you have not your name for nought, you partake of a nature higher than human. Your feet should stand where other men’s heads are; you should live as far above the carnal world as grace is above nature, as heaven is above earth. Christ would never have stooped beneath angels, but to raise your hearts and lives above men. He would never have humbled himself to take the human nature, but on a design to make us partakers of the divine; nor would he have walked on earth, but to make a way to elevate our hearts to heaven. Say not, therefore, flesh and blood cannot bear such an injury or for bear such a sensual pleasure. Either thou art more than a man, or less than a Christian. Flesh and blood never revealed the gospel to thee, flesh and blood never received Christ; in a word, flesh and blood shall never enter into the kingdom of God. If thou beest a Christian, thou art baptized into the spirit of the gospel; thou hast a heaven-born nature, and that will enable thee to do more than flesh and blood can do. Hast thou no desire to see others converted by the gospel? Wouldst thou steal to heaven alone, and carry none of thy neighbours with thee? Now, how shalt thou win them into a good opinion of the gospel, but by such an amiable life as may commend it unto their consciences? It was a charge long ago laid upon Christianity, that it was better known ‘in leaves of books than in the lives of Christians.’ From hence it is, that many are hardened in their wickedness and prejudice against the gospel. He is an unwise fisherman that scareth away the fish which he desires to get within his net. O offend not those, by scandals in thy life, whom thou wouldst have converted by the preaching of the gospel. There is now-a-days, saith one, much talk, as if the time for the Jews’ conversion were at hand; but, saith he, the loose lives of Christians do so disparage this heavenly mystery, that the time seems further off. Indeed, the purity of Christians’ lives is the best attractive to win others to the love of religion. Had Christ’s doves more sweet spices of humility, charity, patience, and other heavenly graces, in their wings, as they fly about the world, they would soon bring more company home with them to the church’s lockers. This is the gold that should overlay the temple of Christ’s church, and would make others in love with its beauty. This was one happy means for the incredible increase of converts in the primitive times. Then the mystery of the gospel was made known, not only by the apostles’ powerful preaching, but by Christians’ holy living. See how they walked, Acts 2:46; and what was the blessed fruit of it ‘They had favour with all the people, and the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved,’ ver. 47. It would tempt any almost but a devil—who loves to live in the fire of contention, and is desperately hardened against all goodness—to have entered their names into such a heavenly society; but when this gold grew dim, then the gospel began to lose its credit in the world, and consequently its takings. Converts came in

slower when those that professed the gospel began to cool in their zeal and slacken in the strictness of their lives.

[*The minister is to declare the gospel WITH BOLDNESS.*]

THIRD OBSERVABLE. The *manner* how the gospel minister is to perform his work—*‘that I may open my mouth boldly.’* We must inquire:—*First.* What this boldness is the apostle desires prayers for. *Second.* Wherein the minister is to express the boldness in preaching the gospel. *Third.* What kind of boldness it is that he must show. *Fourth.* Some helps to procure boldness.

*First.* What *this boldness is the apostle desires prayers for.* The words are *‘to speak boldly,’* and import these two things:

1. To speak *all that he hath in command from God to deliver.* This lies full in the etymon of the word. Thus Paul kept nothing back of God’s counsel, Acts 20:27. He ‘concealed not the words of the holy One,’ as Job’s phrase is.

2. To speak *with liberty and freedom of spirit*—without fear or bondage to any, be they many or mighty. Now this is seen, (1.) By speaking *openly*, and not in corners; the trick of heretics and false teachers, who ‘privily bring in their damnable heresies.’ It is said Christ ‘spake them openly’ —*‘to speak openly,’* Mark 8:32. (2.) By speaking *plainly*. It shows some fear in the heart, when our words are dark and shady—that the preachers’ judgment or opinion cannot easily be spelled from his words, he lays the so close and ambiguous. The minister is to speak truth freely and plainly. This was the apostle’s boldness, ‘Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech,’ —‘we use great boldness;’ so your margin II Cor. 3:12.

*Second.* Wherein the minister is to *show this boldness in preaching the gospel.*

1. In *asserting the truths of the gospel.* He is not to smother truth for the face or fear of any. Ministers are called witnesses. A witness is to speak what he knows, though it be in open court before the greatest of men. Paul had a free tongue to speak the truth, even in prison, though he was in bonds, yet he tells us ‘the word of God is not bound,’ II Tim. 2:9. Some truths will go down easily; to preach these requires no boldness. The worst in the congregation will give the preacher thanks for his pains upon some subject; but there are displeasing truths, truths that cross the opinion, may be, of some in the assembly; to preach these requires a free and bold spirit. When Christ was to preach before the Pharisees, he was not afraid to preach against their errors. Had some wary preacher been to have stood in his place, he would have pitched upon such a subject as should not have offended their tender ears. There are truths that expose the preacher to scorn and derision, yet not to be concealed. Paul preached the resurrection, though some in the assembly mocked him for his pains. There are truths that sometimes may expose the minister to danger—truths that carry the cross at their back. Such was that truth that Isaiah delivered concerning the rejection of the Jews. ‘But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought me not,’ Rom. 10:20. This was like to enrage his countrymen, and bring their

fists about his ears. We read of a 'word of patience' which we are to keep, Rev. 3.10. Such a word as the preacher had need have good store of patience that delivers it, and Christians that profess it, because it may bring them into trouble, and draw the persecutor's sword against them. This is not always the same. The word of patience in the apostle's time was truths levelled against Judaism and heathenism; under the Arian emperors, it was the deity of Christ; in Luther's time the doctrine of justification, and others asserted by him against the Romish church.

2. Boldness in *reproving sin, and denouncing judgment against impenitent sinners*. They are commanded 'to lift up their voice like a trumpet, and tell Jerusalem her sins.' 'Preach the word,' saith Paul; 'be instant in season, and out of season; reprove, rebuke with all long-suffering.' He must reprove, and continue therein while they continue to sin. The dog ceases not to bark so long as the thief is in the yard. A minister without this boldness is like a smooth file, a knife without an edge, a sentinel that is afraid to let off his gun when he should alarm the city upon a danger approaching. Nothing more unworthy to see a people bold to sin and the minister afraid to reprove. It is said of Tacitus that he took the same liberty to write the emperor's lives that they took in leading them. So should the minister in reproving sin, be they who they will. Not the beggar's sin, and spare the gentleman's; not the profane, and skip over the professor's sin. It was all one to Christ; whoever sinned should hear of it. The scribes and Pharisees, them he paid to purpose; neither connives he at his own disciples, but rebukes them sharply. 'Get thee behind me, Satan,' saith he to Peter; 'Woman, what have I to do with thee?' to his own mother for her unseasonable importunity.

*Third. What kind of boldness must the minister's be.*

1. A *convincing boldness*. 'How forcible are right words?' saith Job; and how feeble are empty words, though shot with a thundering voice? Great words in reproving an error or sin, but weak arguments, produce laughter oftener than tears. Festus thought it 'unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him,' Acts 25:27. Much more unreasonable is it in the pulpit to condemn an error and not prove it so; a practice and not convince of the evil of it. The apostle saith of some, 'Their mouths must be stopped,' Titus 1:11. They are convincing arguments that must stop the mouth. Empty reproofs will soon open the mouths of those that are reproved, wider, than shut them. The Spirit of God reproves by convincing, 'And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin,' John 16:8, he will convince; and so should the minister. This is to preach in the evidence and demonstration of the Spirit.

2. A *wise boldness*. The minister is to reprove the sins of all, but to personate none. Paul, being to preach before a lascivious and unrighteous prince, touched him to the quick, but did not name him in his sermon. Felix's conscience would save Paul that labour; he 'trembled,' though Paul did not say he meant him.

3. A *meek boldness*. 'The words of wise men are heard in quiet,' Ecc. 9:17. Let the reproof be as sharp as thou wilt, but thy spirit must be meek. Passion raiseth the

blood of him that is reproved, but compassion turns his bowels. The oil in which the nail is dipped makes it drive the easier, which otherwise have riven the board. We must not denounce wrath in wrath, lest sinners think we wish their misery; but rather with such tenderness, that they may see it is no pleasing work to us to rake in their wounds, but do it, that we might not by a cruel silence and foolish pity be accessory to their ruin, which we cordially desire to prevent. Jeremiah sounds the alarm of judgment, and tells them of a dismal calamity approaching; yet at the same time appeals to God, and clears himself of all cruelty towards them: 'I have not hastened from being a pastor to follow thee: neither have I desired the woeful day; thou knowest: that which came out of my lips was right before thee,' Jer. 17:16. As if he had said, I have delivered my message in denouncing judgment (for I durst do no other), but it was with a merciful heart; I threatened ruin, but wished for peace. Thus Daniel, he dealt plainly and roundly with the king, but ushers in his hard message with an affectionate expression of his love and loyalty to him: 'My lord, the dream be to them that hate thee, and the interpretation thereof to thine enemies,' Dan. 4:19.

4. A *humble boldness*; such a boldness as is raised from a confidence in God, not from ourselves, or our own parts and ability, courage or stoutness. Paul is bold, and yet can tremble and be in fear; bold, in confidence of his God: 'We were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention,' I Thes. 2:2; but full of fear in the sense of his own weakness: 'I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling,' I Cor. 2:3.

5. A *zealous boldness*. Our reproofs of sin must come from a warm heart. Paul's spirit was stirred within him when he saw the city given to idolatry. Jeremiah tells us 'the word of God was as fire in his bones;' it broke out of his mouth as the flame out of a furnace. The word is a hammer, but it breaks not the flinty heart when lightly laid on. King James said of a minister in his time, he preached as if death was at his back. Ministers should set forth judgment as if it were at the sinner's back, ready to take hold of him. Cold reproofs or threatenings, they are like the rumblings of thunder afar off, which affright not as a clap over our head doth. I told you the minister's boldness must be meek and merciful, but not to prejudice zeal. The physician may sweeten his pill to make his patient to swallow it better; but not to such a degree as will weaken the force of its operation.

*Fourth.* We promised to propound *some helps to procure this boldness.*

1. A *holy fear of God*. We fear man so much because we fear God so little. One fear cures another as one fire draws out another. When your finger is burned you hold it to the fire; when man's terror scares you, turn your thoughts to meditate on the wrath of God. This is the plaster God lays to Jeremiah's wrists to cure his anguish distemper of man's fear. 'Be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them,' Jer. 1:17. If we must be broken in pieces—so is the original—better man do it than God. What man breaks in pieces God can make whole again. 'He that loseth his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it,' Mark 8:35. But if God break

us in pieces, it is beyond the skill of man to gather the sherds, and remake what God hath marred.

2. Castle thyself *within the power and promise of God for thy assistance and protection*. He that is a coward in the open field grows valiant and fearless when got within strong walls and bulwarks. Jeremiah was even laying down his arms, and fleeing from the face of those dangers which his ministry to a rebellious and enraged people exposed him. Hear what course he had in his thoughts to take, because the word of the Lord was made a reproach to him, and a derision daily: 'Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name,' Jer. 20:9. Now what kept him from this cowardly flight? 'But the Lord is with me as a mighty terrible one,' ver. 11. Now he takes heart, and goes on with his work undauntedly. Our eye, alas! is on our danger, but not on the invisible walls and bulwarks which God hath promised to set about us. The prophet's servant, that saw the enemy's army approaching, was in a panic fright; but the prophet, that saw the heavenly host for his lifeguard about him, cared not a rush for them all. If God be not able to protect thee, why dost thou go on his errand at all? If thou believest he is, why art thou afraid to deliver it when he is able to deliver thee?

3. Keep a *clear conscience*. He cannot be a bold reprovor that is not a conscientious liver. Such a one must speak softly for fear of waking his own guilty conscience. He is like one that shoots in a rusty foul piece, his reproofs recoil upon himself. Unholiness in the preacher's life either will stop his mouth from reproofing, or the people's ears from receiving what he saith. O how harsh a sound does such a cracked bell make in the ears of its auditors! Every one desires, if he must be smitten, that it may be by the hand of 'the righteous,' Ps. 141:5. Good counsel from a wicked man is spoiled by his stinking breath that delivers it. Our Saviour was fain to bid them hear the Pharisees, because their persons were a scandal to their doctrine, Matt. 23:2, 3. Even those that are good are too prone to turn their back off the ordinance for the scandal of him that officiates. This is their weakness and sin; but woe be to them at whose wickedness they stumble upon this temptation. It shows the man hath a very good stomach, that can eat his dinner out of a slovenly cook's hands; and a very sound judgment and quick appetite to the word, that can fall to and make a hearty meal of it without any squeamish scrupulosity or prejudice from the miscarriages of the preacher.

4. Consider that which thou most fearest *is best prevented by thy freedom and holy boldness in thy ministry*. Is it danger to thy life thou fearest? No such way to secure it as by being faithful to him that hath the sole dispose of it. In whose hands thinkest thou are thy times? Surely in God's. Then it is thy best policy to keep him thy friend; for, 'when thy ways please him, he can make thy enemies to be at peace with thee.' Man-pleasing is both endless and needless. If thou wouldst, thou couldst not please all; and if thou couldst, there is no need, so thou pleasest one that can turn all their hearts or bind their hands. They speed best that dare be faithful. Jonah was afraid of his work. O he durst not go to such a great city with so sad a message! To

tell them they should be destroyed was to set them a work to destroy him that brought the news. But how near was he losing his life by running away to save it? Jeremiah seemed the only man like to lose his life by his bold preaching, yet had fairer quarter at last than the smooth preachers of the times. However, it is better to die honourably than live shamefully. Is it thy name thou art tender of? If thou beest free and bold, the word thou deliverest will be a reproach and daily derision to thee, as once to Jeremiah. Thou mayest, indeed, be mocked by some, but thou wilt be revered by more; yea, even they that wag their heads at thee carry that in their conscience which will make them fear thee. They are the flattering preachers—who are ‘partial in the law’—that become ‘base’ among the people, Mal. 2:9.

5. Consider, if thou beest not now bold for Christ in thy ministry, thou *canst not be bold before Christ at his judgment-bar*. He that is afraid to speak for Christ will certainly be ashamed to look on his face then. ‘We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ,’ &c., II Cor. 5:10. Now what use doth Paul make of this solemn meditation? ‘Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men,’ ver. 11. It is no wisdom to provoke the judge by flattering the prisoner. A serious thought of that day, as we are going to preach, would make us shut all base fear out of the pulpit. It is a very small thing to be judged by man now for our boldness, but dismal to be condemned by Christ for our cowardice. This is man’s judgment-day, as Paul calls it, I Cor. 4:3. Every one dares tax the preacher, and pass his sentence upon him, if he please not his itching ear; but Christ will have his judgment-day also, to judge them that now take upon them to judge others, and his sentence will easily reverse theirs. Yea, even those that now condemn thy freedom thy freedom to reprove would be the first to accuse thee for thy sinful silence. The wicked servant, who likes the remissness of his master’s government—whereby he may play his ungodly pranks without control—cries out of him at the gallows, and is oft heard there to lay both his sin, and sad catastrophe of his life to which it brings him, at his master’s door; saying, ‘If he had reproved me, the magistrate had not condemned me; if he had done his duty, the hangman had not now been to do his office.’ Thus may some at the last day accuse their cowardly ministers, and say, ‘If they had told them their danger, they had not run into it; if they had been bold to reprove their sin, they had not been so impudent to live in the practice of it, which now hath brought them to everlasting shame and misery.’

6. Consider *how bold Christ was in his ministry*. His very enemies were forced to give him this testimony, ‘We know that thou sayest and teachest rightly, neither acceptest thou the person of any, but teachest the way of God truly,’ Luke 20:21. He spared not the proudest of them, but to their head reproved them, and denounced the judgment of God against them. When in the midst of his enemies, he was not daunted with their high looks or furious threats, but owned that very truth which they made his capital crime, Matt. 27:11; John 18:37. Hence Paul saith of him that ‘before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession,’ I Tim. 6:13; and useth this as the most powerful argument to conjure Timothy to be faithful in his ministry. What greater

incentive to valour can the soldier have, than to see his general before him stand with undaunted courage where the bullets fly thickest? Such valiant captains do not use to breed white-livered soldiers. It is impossible we should be dastardly if instructed by him and acted with his spirit. When the high-priest and elders 'saw the boldness of Peter and John'—who were converted before them—they soon knew where they had got this heroic resolved spirit; for it is said, 'they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus,' Acts 4:13.

7. Pray and beg prayers, *for this holy boldness*. Thus did the apostles come by it. Their natural boldness was not the product of any natural greatness of spirit they had above others. You see what stout soldiers they were in themselves by their poor-spirited behaviour at Christ's attachment, when they all ran away in a fright, and left him to shift for himself. No; this boldness was the child of prayer; it was not bred in them, but granted from heaven unto them at their humble suit. See them praying hard for it: 'Now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word,' Acts 4:29. Mark, they do not pray against suffering, but for '*boldness*' to preach, whatever it may cost them. They desire not to be excused the battle, but to be armed with courage to stand in it. They had rather be lift above the fear of suffering, than have an immunity from suffering. Let God but give them boldness to do their duty, and stand to their tackling, and they have enough. Now see how soon God sets his fiat to their prayers: 'And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness,' ver. 31. There is the grace they desired, dropped into their bosom, in a farther measure than ever they had it. If the soldier hath a desire to fight for his prince, no doubt he may have arms for asking. If this be thy sincere request, God will not deny it. See them also sending others to God upon this errand for them, Col. 4:3, and here in the text. Certainly people cannot desire that of God for their minister which both he and they need more. It is a difficult duty to them, but necessary for you. He cannot be a faithful minister that dares not deliver all his message. When Mauritius the emperor had inquired of Phocas' disposition, he said, *si timidus est, homicida est*—if he be timorous, he is a murderer. He that fears his people's faces is the man that is most like to murder their souls; so that you pray for yourselves, while you endeavour to pray down this gift upon your minister.

#### BRANCH FOURTH.

[THE DOUBLE ARGUMENT *of Paul enforcing his request for the prayers of believers*].

*'For which I am an ambassador in bonds.'*

We are at length got to the last general head in the words—*the double argument with which the apostle backs his request*, the more effectually to provoke them to the remembrance of him in their prayers. FIRST. Taken *from his office*—‘*for which I am an ambassador.*’ SECOND. From his present afflicted state—‘*an ambassador in bonds.*’

[*An argument for Paul's request,*  
TAKEN FROM HIS OFFICE.]

FIRST ARGUMENT. Paul enforces his request for his people's prayers by an argument *taken from his office*. Ambassadors being messengers of state, sent by princes abroad about great affairs of their kingdom, it behoves all good subjects to wish them good speed and success in their embassy. Upon this account, Paul, being sent from the great God in embassy as the apostle of the Gentiles, desires the church's prayers for a happy success to the message he brings.

NOTE. *Ministers of the gospel are God's ambassadors.* The apostle doth not monopolize this title, as if none were so beside himself; for elsewhere he reads others in the commission, ‘We are ambassadors for Christ,’ II Cor. 5:20—that is, we apostles who are now upon the place, and in the employment of the gospel, and such also as shall be despatched after us to the end of the world upon the same errand. The authority of the apostles' extraordinary commission, and that which ordinary ministers after them have, is the same for substance, only they had their mission immediately from Christ's mouth, and were ecumenical; whereas ordinary ministers receive it from the church by an authority derived from Christ, and are fixed to their particular orbs, and are to lie as ambassadors legier in some one place whither they are sent. In handling this point we shall inquire into these three particulars. *First.* Why ministers are called ambassadors. *Second.* Why God would send ambassadors to his poor creature. *Third.* Why he useth weak men and not glorious angels, to be his ambassadors in this negotiation.

[*WHY ministers are called AMBASSADORS.*]

*First.* Let us inquire *why ministers are called ambassadors*: and that is, 1. To set out the dignity of their function. 2. To set out the duty of their function.

[*THE DIGNITY of the ministry is expressed*  
*by the title 'ambassadors.'*]

1. Ministers of the gospel are by God designated ambassadors, *to set out the dignity of their office*. God by this title would procure and honourable esteem of the ministers' calling in the hearts of all those to whom they are sent. This is more necessary to the good success of their message than is generally thought. I know very well that what ministers speak on this subject, they are thought in it to be rather kind

to themselves, than friends to the gospel. Men are prone to interpret it as a fruit of their pride, and an affectation they have of some outward grandeur and worldly pomp which they design to gain by such a magnificent title. The apostle himself was sensible of this, and therefore, when he had called for that respect which was due to the minister's function — 'Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God'—he gives a caveat, that they would 'judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come,' I Cor. 4:1, 5. Then it shall be known from what spirit it is that we ministers magnify our office, and have been acted by in our function; and also by what spirit they are moved who vilify and despise both it and our persons for our calling's sake. Now the dignity of gospel ambassadors will appear in three things.

(1.) In the *greatness of the Prince from whom they come*. Ambassadors have their respect according to the rank of their master that sends them; the greater the prince, the more honourable is his messenger. Now, the ministers of the gospel come from the great God, who is 'King of kings and Lord of lords'—by whom they reign and of whom they hold all their principalities. This is their Master in whose name they come. Therefore Moses, when he was to deliver his message to Israel, bids them 'ascribe greatness to that God' whose name and will he was to publish, Deut. 32:3. The potentates of the world have found to their cost how deeply God takes himself concerned in the affronts that are done to his servants. What brought Israel's flourishing kingdom to ruin but their mocking his messengers and misusing his prophets? Then 'the wrath of God arose against his people, till there was no remedy,' II Chr. 36:16. We cannot despise the messenger and honour his master that sends him, Luke 10:16. Few are so bold as to say with that proud king, 'Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?' Ex. 5:2. But too many dare say, Who is the minister, that I should obey his message?—repent at his summons, tremble at the words he delivers? forgetting, alas! they have God's authority for what they say; and so, by a slanting blow, they hit God himself in contemning his ambassador.

(2.) In the *greatness of the Person whose place the minister supplies*. Ministers are but deputy ambassadors; Christ himself had the first patent; called therefore 'the Messenger of the covenant,' Mal. 3:1; and 'the Apostle...of our profession,' Heb. 3:1. From him the ministers receive their authority: 'All power is given unto me,...Go ye therefore, and teach all nations,' Matt. 28:18. So, II Cor. 5:20, 'We pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.' As if the apostle had said, We do but deliver that message which Christ should and would have done had he not been called to heaven about the affairs of his church; and therefore hath left us as his deputies to carry out that ministry which himself began when he was here below. Now, what an honour is it for a poor creature to stand up in Christ's room and bring that message to poor sinners which was first committed unto him?

(3.) In the *excellency of the message they bring*. There are three kinds of embassies in the world which make way for their honourable entertainment that are

the messengers to bring them to any state—embassies for peace, embassies for marriage, and embassies for trade.

(a) *Embassies for peace.* Beautiful are their feet, and honoured are their persons, that bring glad tidings of peace along with them; especially four things concur in their embassy, which will all be found in the minister's negotiation.

[1.] When an ambassador *comes from some puissant prince whose power is formidable and armies irresistible.* An ambassador from such a prince, to a people naked and unarmed, for peace and amity, O how welcome is his approach! Such a king we come from. He offers not peace because he cannot maintain a war or stands in need of our friendship. Sinners need his favour, but he fears not their hostility. Never could they yet shoot any of their arrows so high as heaven, but all have come down upon their own heads. What can he that spits against the wind, but look to have it blown back upon his own face? and he that fights with God, but expect to have his weapons beat back to his own head? Worldly princes treat when they cannot fight. Think not so of the great God. His instruments of death are ready. No place where he hath not his armed troops able to fetch in his proudest enemies. No creature so little but contains an army in it big enough to tame the proudest king in the world. The worm under Herod's foot, at God's command, shall seize on him and eat out his heart. O with what fear and trembling should the ambassadors of this God be received! When Samuel the prophet came to Bethlehem, 'the elders of the town trembled at his coming, and said, Comest thou peaceably?' I Sam. 16:4.

[2.] When such a puissant prince *sends his ambassadors for peace to a people that have already felt the impressions of his power, and are pining under the bleeding miseries which their war with him has brought upon them,* O how would they run to open their city gates to his ambassador!—as willingly surely as Noah opened the window to receive the dove that brought the olive-branch after that dismal flood. This is the deplored state which the ministry of the gospel finds mankind involved in. What a forlorn condition hath our war with heaven brought us into! Do we not feel the arrows of divine vengeance sticking in our very hearts and consciences? The curse of God cleaving to every faculty of our souls and member of our bodies? Are not all the creatures in arms against us? and doth not hell from beneath open its devouring mouth upon us, ready to swallow us in everlasting destruction? And yet we are so stout that we can find no lodging in our town for his ambassadors, but a prison? no entertainment to the offers of peace they make, but contempt and scorn?

[3.] When the terms of peace he brings *are honourable.* Gold, we say, may be bought too dear, and so may the peace of one state with another; as when Nahash the Ammonite offered peace to the men of Jabesh-Gilead, but upon condition that they should have 'every one his right eye thrust out, to lay it as a reproach on Israel,' and therefore was rejected with just indignation; they resolving rather to die with honour than live with shame. It is the custom among many of this world's princes to make their demands according to the length of their sword. When their power is great it is

hard to have peace on easy terms. Now this, one would think, should make the ministers of the gospel and their message infinitely welcome to poor sinners, that, though they come from the great God that may make his own demands—for who may say to God, ‘What doest thou?’—and might not only require the eye out of your head, but force the very heart out of your body; yet offers peace on such gracious terms, that we could not possibly have framed them so to our own advantage, had we been left to draw them, as he of his own free grace is pleased to propound them; there being nothing in the whole instrument of peace provided for himself, besides the securing of his own glory in our salvation. See, a little, what he offers to poor sinners, and what he requires of them again. He offers to seal an act of oblivion, wherein all wrongs done to his crown and dignity in the time of our hostility against him shall be forgiven and forgotten. So runs the promise, ‘He will forgive them their iniquities, and remember them no more.’ He will not only forgive what is past, but receive our persons into favour for the future. A prince may save a malefactor’s life, but forever banish his person from court. But God promiseth access into his presence. ‘By whom also we have access by faith into this grace (or favour) wherein we stand,’ Rom. 5:2. Yea, he promiseth to restore the sinner to all that by his rebellion was forfeited. Treason taints the blood, degrades from honour, and confiscates the estate; God offers to take off the whole curse which befell the sinner for his rebellion, and restores him to his primitive dignity. He ‘gives them power to become his children,’ John 1:12, and, as his children, makes them his heirs, and that not to a Cabul here below only, but to heaven itself, an inheritance in light beyond all expression glorious; for godliness hath both the promise of this life and that which is to come.

Now, let us see what he expects at the sinner’s hand. Not to purchase this his favour with a ransom out of his own purse! No, he empties his Son’s veins to pay that. But he requires us, (a) To lay down the weapons of our rebellion—for he cannot in honour treat with us while we have that sword in our hand with which we have fought against him. (b) To accept our pardon and peace at the hands of free grace; attributing the glory of it to the mere mercy of God as the moving, and Christ’s satisfactory obedience as the meritorious cause. (c) That we shall swear fealty and allegiance to him for the future. How reasonable these are, those that now reject them shall confess with infinite shame and horror for their folly, when Christ shall pack them to hell by his irrevocable sentence.

[4.] When in all this a prince is *real in the offers of peace he makes, and gives full security for the performance of what he promiseth*, this must needs make the ambassador that brings them still the more welcome. Treaties of peace among men are too often used but as a handsome blind for war—they intend least what they pretend most. But when an ambassador comes plenipotentiary, and enabled to give full security and satisfaction against all fears and jealousies that may arise in the breasts of those he treats with, this gives a value to all the rest. Now, the great God hath wonderfully condescended to satisfy the querulous hearts of poor sinners. Guilt hath made man suspicious of God; his own unfaithfulness to God makes him jealous

of God's faithfulness unto him. Could Satan make Eve so question the truth of God's promise? He saith but, 'Ye shall not surely die?' and she is presently shaken out of her faith on her Maker to believe her destroyer. O how easy then is it for him to nourish those suspicions which do naturally breed now in our unbelieving hearts! How oft are we putting it to the question, Will God forgive so great, so many sins? May I venture to believe? Now God gives his ambassadors full instructions from his word to satisfy all the doubts and scruples which he injects, or which may arise from our own misgiving hearts. *Tota Scriptura hoc agit*, saith Luther, *ne dubitamus sed certò speremus*—the whole Scripture drives at this, to satisfy our doubts, and assure our hopes in the mercy of God. St. Paul hath a passage something like this, 'Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope,' Rom. 15:4.

There are many expedients men use to satisfy the minds of those they deal with concerning the truth of their promises and certainty of their performing them. Sometimes they ratify them with their seal set to the writing. Thus God gives the broad seal of the sacraments, and privy seal of his Spirit, to assure the believer he will perform all he hath promised in his word. Sometimes witnesses are called in for further security of the conveyance. Thus in the purchase Jeremiah made of his kinsman's field, he took witnesses to the bargain, Jer. 32:10. See witnesses both in heaven and earth, ready to vouch the truth of what God promiseth, and all agree in their verdict, I John 5:7, 8. If all these will not do, then an oath is taken, and this useth to be 'an end of controversies.' To this also doth God graciously condescend. Not that God's promise needs the suretiship of his oath to make it surer—for it is as impossible God should lie when he promiseth as when he swears—but to make our faith stronger, which needs such supporters as these to stay and strengthen it; as is hinted in that sweet place, from which one flower the sincere believer may suck honey enough to live comfortably upon in the hardest longest winter of affliction that can befall him: 'Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation,' &c., Heb. 6:17, 18. Now, the greater the security God enables his ambassadors to offer poor sinners for the salvation they preach in his name, the more prodigiously provoking is their unbelief and impenitency who reject it. When Titus Vespasian came into Jerusalem, and saw the unspeakable miseries which the besieged had endured from those three sore plagues, sword, pestilence, and famine, that had so long raged among them, it is said that he broke out into these words, 'I am not guilty of all this blood which hath been shed, nor of the miseries this people have endured; that by their obstinacy have brought it upon their own heads.' O how much more may the ambassadors of Christ wash their hands over the heads of impenitent sinners, to whom they have so oft offered pardon and peace in God's name, but they would not hearken, and say, 'We are free from your blood; it is your own obstinacy and

desperate impenitency hath undone your precious souls. Would you have accepted life at the hands of mercy, you should not have been cut off by the sword of his justice.'

*(b) Embassies for marriage.* To offer an alliance by marriage between one state and another, this is one great part of the minister's embassy. They are sent to let the world know what good-will the God of heaven bears to poor sinners; that he can be content to bestow his only Son and heir in marriage upon them, if they also upon treaty can like the match. Nay more, both Father and Son desire it. It is a match which God himself first thought on for his Son. It sprang from the counsel of his own will; and when this great intendment was transacted betwixt Father and Son—as it was before the foundation of the world—the Son declared his liking of it to his Father, yea, expressed the dear affection he bore to mankind; for then it was that he 'rejoiced in the inhabitable parts of the earth, and his delights were with the sons of men.' In pursuance of this, 'when the fulness of time was come,' he took his progress from heaven to earth, that by marrying our nature he might also enter a near alliance with the persons of believers. This is the match God's ambassadors come to negotiate with you. The Scriptures are their credential letters, that confirm, under God's own handwriting and seal, the truth of all they offer in his name. There you have the picture of his heavenly Prince they woo your affections for drawn to the life in his glory, love, and loveliness, that, by knowing him, you may the better take liking to his person; there are the rich bracelets of the promises, which his messengers are in his name to deliver to those willing souls that shall entertain the motion, and declare their consent to take him for their Lord and husband; yea, they have authority to pronounce the contract, and to promise in Christ's name marriage, which at the great day he will perform unto them: 'I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ,' II Cor. 11:2. Stand here and adore, ye children of men, this low stoop of divine majesty! O that ever it should enter into the heart of the great God to match his Son unto his creature, and that not of the noblest house among them! for 'he took not upon him the nature of angels,' but of mankind, not in its primitive state, but when it was lapsed and degraded of its primitive glory. For a high-born prince to take a poor damsel out of the beggar's row, is a thing that yet the world hath not been acquainted with. But to take one from the meanest cottage were not so strange as to take her from the jail or bar, where she is condemned for treason against his royal person. Yet this is the very case—the Lord offers to lift up the head of his rebel creature out of prison, where it lies under a sentence of death for horrid treason against his crown and dignity, to take it into his bed and bosom. Truly I know not at which most to wonder; whether at the mercy of God in making love to us, or our pride and folly that are so coy hardly persuaded to entertain the motion. Though Abigail confessed herself unworthy to be David's wife, yet she was too wise to stand in her own light, by letting slip such an opportunity for her preferment as was not like again to occur; therefore it is said, 'She made haste to go with David's servants.' But alas! how do we either broadly deny, or foolishly make excuse, and hold God's messengers in suspense from day to day.

(c) *Embassies for commerce and trade.* Suppose a prince had in his kingdom rich commodities, without which his neighbour nation could not subsist, nor could find elsewhere; if this prince should send an ambassador to this people, and offer them a free trade, that they might come as oft as they pleased and take of the good things of his land, O how joyfully would such an embassy be embraced! Man's happiness on earth lies in a free trade and commerce with heaven. This world is a barren beggarly place. Nothing is here to be had that an immortal soul can live upon or find satisfaction from. In heaven alone what it needs is to be found. The food it must live on, the clothes it must wear, are both of the growth of this heavenly country. Man's first sin spoiled all his trade with heaven. No sooner did Adam rebel, but a war was commenced, and all trade with him forbidden. Therefore, in our natural state, we are said to be 'afar off,' and 'without God in the world.' The sad effects of this loss are to be seen in the forlorn condition of man's soul, which was once was so gloriously arrayed with righteousness and holiness, but now shamefully naked—not having a rag to cover its shame withal.

Now, God sends his ambassadors to offer peace, and with it liberty to return to its first communion with him: '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.' He invites all to turn merchants with heaven, 'Come ye to the waters;' by which phrase the gospel is compared to a port-town, or its quay-side, to which the crier calls people to repair, and buy commodities that are there landed. Here it is that God sets forth the riches of his grace to view and sale 'without money and without price.' That must needs be a gainful trade which brings in rich treasure without much cost exported. Here is all the riches of heaven to be had, and no money required for the purchase. Can you hear of this pearl of price, and not turn merchants for it? Or can your souls be maintained by your peddling worldly trade? O, why do ye spend your money for that which is not bread? It is not necessary you should be rich in the world, but it is necessary you should have Christ and his grace. In all your pains and travail for the things of this world, you are but merchant adventurers—it is a hazard you get them or lose your labour. There is no certain rule and method can be learned for growing rich in the world. There are some poor as well as rich of every trade; but, in this trade for Christ and his grace, there is an office erected to insure all your adventure. His soul shall live that seeks the Lord; he that hungers after righteousness shall be satisfied.

[THE DUTY of the ministry is set out  
by the title 'ambassadors.']

2. Ministers of the gospel are by God designated ambassadors, *to set out the duty of their office.* Where there is *honor* there is *onus*—places of honour are places of trust and service. Many like well enough to hear of the minister's dignity—with Diotrefes, they love pre-eminence—that would willingly be excused the labour that

attends it. None have a greater trust deposited in their hands than the minister. It is *tremendum onus*—a weight that made the apostle tremble under it: ‘I was among you,’ saith Paul, ‘with much fear and trembling.’ To them is ‘committed the word of reconciliation,’ II Cor. 5:19. If the treaty of peace between God and sinners doth not speed, the ambassador is sure to be called to an account how he discharged his place. But more of the minister’s duty as an ambassador afterwards.

*[Why God delivers his gospel by  
AMBASSADORS FROM MANKIND.]*

*Second.* The second thing we propounded to give an account of was, *why God would send ambassadors to his poor creature.* I answer,

1. *Negatively.*

(1.) Not because he *needs man’s good-will.* Earthly princes’ affairs require they should hold a correspondence with their neighbours, therefore they send ambassadors to preserve peace or preserve amity. But God can defend his crown without the help of allies.

(2.) Not because he was *bound to do it.* There is a law of nations, yea of nature, that obliges princes before they commence a war to offer peace. But the great God cannot be bound, except he binds himself. When Adam sinned, God was free, and might have chosen whether he would make a new league with man, or take vengeance on him for breaking his faith in the first. But,

2. *Affirmatively.* No other account can be given of this but the good-will and free-grace of God. When Christ, who is the prime Ambassador, landed first on earth, see what brought him hither, ‘Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us,’ Luke 1:78. Tender mercy indeed, for the life of man lay under God’s foot at his pure mercy. He was no more bound to treat with his creature than a prince with a traitor legally condemned. Wherever God’s ambassadors come, they come on mercy’s errand: ‘The Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people,’ II Chr. 36:15.

*Question.* But if God will treat with his poor creatures, *why doth he it by ambassadors, and not by himself immediately?*

*Answer.* This is the fruit of divine indulgence. Sin hath made the presence of God dreadful; man cannot now well bear it. What a fright was Adam put into when he heard but the voice of God walking towards him in the garden, and not furiously rushing upon him? The Jews had the trial of this; they soon had enough of God’s presence, and therefore came to Moses, saying, ‘Speak thou with us,...but let not God speak with us, lest we die,’ Ex. 20:19.

*[WHY GOD USETH MEN, and not angels,  
as his ambassadors.]*

*Third.* But if God will use ambassadors, *why does he not employ some glorious angels from heaven to bring his message, rather than weak and frail men?*

*Answer* (1). The apostle gives us the reason: 'We have this treasure in earthen vessels, *that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us,*' II Cor. 4:7; —in vessels of shell. As the precious pearl is found in a shell, so this precious treasure of the gospel shall be found in frail men, that the excellency of the work may be of God. The more contemptible the instrument, the more glorious appears his divine power in using it for so high and noble an end. To see a man wound another with a sword that is sharp and weighty would carry no wonder; but to wound him with a feather in his hand, this would speak it a miracle. To see men fall down and tremble when an angel—a creature of such might and glory—is the speaker, is no great wonder; but to behold a Felix quivering on the bench, while a man, and he a poor prisoner at the bar, preacheth to his judge, this carries a double wonder. First, that so poor a creature as Paul was, and in the condition of a prisoner, durst be so bold; and also, that so great a person as Felix was should be smitten with his words, as if some thunderbolt had struck him. Who will not adore the power of a God in the weakness of the instrument? Had God employed angels in this business, we should have been in danger of ascribing the efficacy of the work to the gifts and parts of the instrument, and of giving credit to the message for the messenger's sake that is so honourable. But now, God sending those that are weak creatures like ourselves, when anything is done by them, we are forced to say, 'It is the Lord's doing,' and not the instruments'. What reason God had this way to provide for the safeguarding his own glory, we see by our proneness to idolize the gifts of men, where they are more eminent and radiant than in others. What would we have done if angels had been the messengers? Truly, it would have been hard to have kept us from worshipping them, as we see John himself had done, if he had not been kept back by the angel's seasonable caveat, Rev. 19:10.

*Answer* (2). Ministers, being men, have *an advantage many ways above angels for the work.*

(a) As they are *more nearly concerned in the message they bring* than angels could have been; so that they cannot deceive others, without a wrong to their own salvation. What greater argument for one's care than his own interest? Surely that pilot will look how he steers the ship that hath an adventure in the freight.

(b) Their *affections have a naturalness arising from the sense of those very temptations in themselves* which their brethren labour under. This an angel could not have; and by this they are able to speak more feelingly to the condition of other men than an angel could do. So that what man wants of the angels' rhetoric is recompensed with his natural affection and sympathy flowing from experience. He knows what a troubled conscience is in another, by having felt it throb in his own bosom; as God told his people, having been themselves sojourners in Egypt, 'You

know the heart of a stranger.' And who will treat poor souls with more mercy than they who know they need it themselves?

(c) The *sufferings which ministers meet with for the gospel's sake* are of great advantage to their brethren. Had angels been the ambassadors they could not have sealed to the truth of the doctrine they preached with their blood. Paul's bonds were famous at court and country also: 'Many of the brethren,...waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear,' Php. 1:14. Angels might have sounded the trumpet of the gospel with a shriller voice; but men alone have pitchers to break—I mean frail bodies—by suffering for the gospel, whereby the glory of its truths, like the lamp in Gideon's soldier's hand, shines forth upon the eyes of their greater enemies, to the confusion of their faces and amazement of their hearts.

#### USE OR APPLICATION.

*[Exhortation to the people to hearken  
to God's ambassadors.]*

Are ministers ambassadors? This shows the gospel ministry to be *an office peculiar to some, not a work common to all*. An ambassador we know is someone who hath his commission and credential letters from his prince to show for his employment. It is not a man's skill in state affairs that makes him an ambassador, nor ability in the law that makes a man a magistrate, but their call to these places. Neither do gifts make a man a minister, but his mission: 'How can they preach except they be sent?' The rules which the Spirit of God gives about the minister's admission into his function were all to no purpose if it lay open to every man's own choice to make him a preacher. 'Lay hands suddenly on no man,' I Tim. 5:22; that is, admit none to the ministry without good proof and trial. But why should any be set apart for that which every one may do? This leads to an exhortation, 1. To the people. 2. To the minister.

*Exhortation 1. To the people.* Be persuaded in the fear of God to *hearken to the message these ambassadors bring*. What mean you to do in the business they come to treat about? Will you be friends with God or not?—take Christ by faith into your embraces, or resolve to have none of him? We are but ambassadors; back again we must go to our Master that sends us, and give an account what comes of our negotiation. Shall we go and say, Lord, we have been with the men thou sentest us unto; thy message was delivered by us according to our instructions; we told them fire and sword, ruin and damnation, would come upon them, if they did not at thy call repent and turn; we laid both life and death before them, and spared not to reveal 'the whole counsel of God' for their salvation; but they believed never a word we spake; we were to them as those that mocked, or told what we had dreamed in the night, and not the words of truth and faithfulness? O God forbid that this should be the report

which at their return they make to God of their negotiation! But the more to affect you with the importance of their message, and your answer to it, consider these things following:

(1.) Consider *the wonderful love of God in sending you these ambassadors*. Is it not a prince that sends to one of his own rank, but a God to his rebel creature; against whom he might have sent, not an ambassador to treat, but an army of judgments to fight and destroy. It is not against rebels that are entrenched in some place of strength, or in the field with a force wherewith you are able to resist his power; but to his prisoners fettered and manacled —to you that have your traitorous head on the block. It is not any need he hath of your life that makes him desire your salvation. A prince sometimes saves his rebellious subjects because he needs their hands to fight for him, and weakens himself by shedding their blood; but God can ruin you, and not wrong himself. If you perish, it is without his damage. The Pharisees are said to reject ‘the counsel of God against themselves,’ Luke 7:30. It is you that suffer, not God.

(2.) Consider *what an intolerable affront is given to the majesty of heaven by rejecting his offers of grace*. Princes’ requests are commands. Who dare deny a king what he asks? and darest thou, a poor thimbleful of dust, stout it out against thy Maker? It is charged upon no less than a king as an act of insufferable pride, that ‘he did...evil in the sight of the Lord his God, and humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking from the mouth of the Lord,’ II Chr. 36:12. But what! must a king come down from his throne, and humble himself before a poor prophet that was his own subject. God will not have him tremble and bow, not to Jeremiah, but to ‘Jeremiah...speaking from the mouth of the Lord.’ O, consider this, ye that think it childish and poor-spirited to weep at a sermon, to humble yourselves at the reproof of a minister! Your carriage under the word preached declares what your thoughts of God himself are. When Naash slighted David’s ambassadors, and abused them, the king took the scorn upon himself. ‘I will publish the name of the Lord,’ saith Moses, ‘ascribe ye greatness unto our God,’ Deut. 32:3. How should they ascribe greatness to God while Moses is preaching to them. Surely he means by their humble attendance on, and ready obedience to, the word he delivered in God’s name.

(3.) Consider *how much the heart of God is engaged in the message his ambassadors bring*. When a prince sends an ambassador about a negotiation, the success of which he passionately desires, and from which he promiseth himself much honour, to be opposed in this must needs greatly provoke and enrage him. There is nothing that God sets his heart more upon than the exalting of Christ, and his grace through him, in the salvation of poor sinners. This therefore is called ‘his counsel,’ Heb. 6:17; ‘the pleasure of the Lord,’ Isa. 53:10. Abraham’s servant knew how much his master desired a wife for his son and heir among his kindred, and therefore presseth Laban with this as the weightiest argument of all other, ‘If you will deal kindly and truly with my master, tell me; and it not, tell me;’ as if he had said, By this the truth of your love to my master will be seen. So here. If ye will indeed deal kindly with God, tell his ambassadors so, by your complying with them in that which

he so affectionately desires. This the Lord Jesus, when on earth, called 'his Father's business,' which must be done, whatever comes on it: 'Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?' Luke 2:49. He knew he had never come hither except for the despatch of this, and could not look his Father on the face, when he went back, except this was finished. Therefore, as this sped, and the work of the gospel made progress, or met with any stop, in the hearts of men, he mourned or rejoiced. When it was rejected, we find him 'grieved for the hardness of their hearts,' Mark 3:5. When his disciples make report how victoriously the chariot of the gospel ran, 'in that hour,' it is said, 'he rejoiced in spirit,' Luke 10:21. When he was taking his leave of the world, his thoughts are at work how the gospel should be carried on, and the salvation of souls suffer no prejudice by his departure; he therefore empowers his apostles for the work: 'All power is given me. Go, preach the gospel to all nations.' Yea, now in heaven he is waiting for the success of it, and listening how his servants speed in their errand. Now, what a prodigious sin is it, by thy impenitency to withstand God in his main design! Do you indeed deal kindly with our Master, whose embassy we bring?

(4.) Consider *the weight and importance of the message these ambassadors bring unto you*. It is not a slight, sleeveless errand we come about. 'I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil,' Deut. 30:15. 'He that believeth not,...the wrath of God abideth on him,' John 3:36. We come not to entice you with the favour of an earthly prince, who may promise honours to-day, and lose his own crown to-morrow. We bait not our hook with the world's treasures or pleasures; but bring you news of a heaven that shall as surely be yours as you are now on earth, if you accept of the offer. We scare you not with the displeasure of a mortal man, 'whose breath is in his nostrils;' not with the momentary torment of a rack or gibbet, which continue hardly long enough to be felt; but with the never-dying wrath of the ever-living God. And what we either promise or threaten in God's name, he stands ready and resolved to perform. He 'confirmeth the word of his servants, and performeth the counsel of his messengers;' Isa. 44:26.

(5.) Consider *on what terms the gospel and its messengers stay among you*. There is a time when God calls his ambassadors home, and will treat no longer with a people; and that must needs be a sad day! For, when they go, then judgments and plagues come. If the treaty ends, it will not be long before the war begins. 'Elisha died,...and the bands of the Moabites invaded the land,' II Kings 13:20. The prophet once gone, then the enemy comes. The angel plucks Lot out of Sodom, and how long had they fair weather after? The Jews put away the gospel from them by their impenitency, which made the apostles 'turn to the Gentiles,' Acts 13:46. But did they not thereby call for their own ruin and destruction, which presently came flying on the Roman eagle's wings to them? They judged themselves unworthy of eternal life, and God thought them unworthy also to have a temporal. If once God calls home his ambassadors, it is no easy matter to bring them back, and get the treaty, now broke up, set on foot again. God can least endure, upon trial made of him, to be slighted in that which he makes account is one of the highest ways he can express his favour to

a people. Better no ambassadors had come, than to come and go *re infectâ* —without effecting what they came for. They ‘shall know,’ saith God, ‘there hath been a prophet among them,’ Eze. 2:5; that is, they shall know it to their cost. God will be paid for his ministers’ pains. Now, ministers die, or are removed from their people, and glad they are to be so rid of them; but they have not done with them till they have reckoned with God for them.

*[Exhortation to ministers in discharge of their  
duty as ambassadors of the King of kings.]*

*Exhortation 2. To the ministers of the gospel.* You see, brethren, your calling; *let it be your care to comport with this your honourable employment.* Let us set forth a few directions.

(1.) *Stain not the dignity of your office by any base unworthy practices.* *Dignitas in indigno*, saith Salvian, is *ornamentum in luto*—O lay not the dignity of your function in the dirt by any sordid unholy actions! Paul magnified his office; do not you do that which should make others vilify and debase it. That which makes others bad will make you worse. ‘Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?’ John 6:70. You are called angels, but if wicked, you become devils. We have read of ‘a prophet’s reward,’ Matt. 10:41, which amounts to more than a private disciple’s; and do you not think there will be a prophet’s punishment in hell, as well as reward in heaven? One saith, ‘If any were born without original sin, it should be the minister; if any could live without actual sin it should be the minister; if there were such a thing a venial sin, it should not be in ministers. They are more the servants of God than others; should not they then be more holy than others?’ Art thou fit to be an ambassador, who art not a good subject? to be a minister, that art not a good Christian?

(2.) *Keep close to thy instructions.* Ambassadors are bound up by their commission what they are to say; be sure therefore to take thy errand right, before thou ascendest the pulpit to deliver it. ‘I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you,’ I Cor. 11:23. God bids the prophet, Eze. 3:17, ‘Hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me.’ It must be from him, or it is not right. O take heed thou dost not set the royal stamp upon thy own base metal! Come not to the people with, ‘Thus saith the Lord,’ when it is the divination of thy own brain. No such loud lie as that which is told in the pulpit. And, as thou must not speak what he never gave thee in commission, so not conceal what thou hast in command to deliver. It is as dangerous to blot out, as put in, anything to our message. Job comforted himself with this, that he had ‘not concealed the words of the Holy One,’ Job 6:10. And Paul, from this, washeth his hands of the blood of souls, ‘I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God,’ Acts 20:26, 27. Pray, observe, he doth not say he hath declared *all* the counsel of God. No; who can, but God himself? The same apostle saith, ‘We prophesy but in

part.' There is a *terra incognita*—unknown land, in the Scriptures, mysteries that yet were never fully discovered. We cannot declare all that know not all. But he saith, 'He shunned not to declare all.' When he met a truth, he did not step back to shun it; as when we see a man in the street with whom we have no mind to speak, we step into some house or shop till he be past. The holy apostle was not afraid to speak what he knew to be the mind of God; as he had it from God, so should they from him. He did not balk in his preaching what was profitable for them to know. Caleb, one of the spies sent to Canaan, could not give them a full account of every particular place in the land, but he made the best observation he could, and then brings Moses word again—'As it was,' saith he, 'in mine heart,' Joshua 14:7; while others basely concealed what they knew, because they had no mind to the journey; and this gained him the testimony from God's own mouth to be a man that 'followed him fully,' Num. 14:23. So he that doth his utmost to search the Scriptures, and then brings word to the people as it is in his heart, preaching what he hath learned from it, without garbling his conscience and detaining what he knows for fear or favour, this is the man that fulfills his ministry, and shall have the *euge*—well done! of a faithful servant.

(3.) Think it not enough that thou deliverest thy message from God, but *show a zeal for thy Master, whose cause thou negotiatest*. Should an ambassador, after audience had, and his errand coldly done, then give himself up to the pleasures of the court where he is resident, and not much mind or care what answer he hath, nor how his master's business speeds, surely he could not say he had done the duty of a faithful ambassador. No; his head and heart must be both at work how he may put life into the business and bring it soonest to the desired issue. Abraham's servant would neither eat nor drink till he saw which way his motion would work, and how they would deal with his master. Thus should ministers let those they are sent to see they are in earnest—that their hearts are deeply engaged in their embassy. When their people show their respect to their persons, though they are thankfully to resent this civility, yet they are not to let them know this is not it they come for, or can be content with; but that they would deal kindly with their Master, whose message they bring, and send them back to him with the joyful news of their repentance and acceptation of Christ. They should passionately endeavour their salvation; one while trying to dissolve them with the soft entreaties of love; another while beleaguering them with threatenings, that if they will to hell, they may carry this witness with them, that their destruction is of themselves, and comes not on them for want of your care and compassion to their souls. It is not enough you are orthodox preachers, and deliver truth; it is zeal God calls for at your hands. He so strongly himself desires the salvation of poor sinners, that he disdains you, whom he sends to impart it to them, should coldly deliver it, without showing your good-will to the thing. Christ, when he sends his servants to invite guests to his gospel-supper, bids them 'compel them to come in,' Luke 14:23. But how? Surely not as the Spaniards did the Indians, who drove them to be baptized as we drive cattle with staves and stones. We are not to pelt them in with outward violence and cruelty practised upon their bodies, but [by] a spiritual

force of argument subduing their hearts in our powerful preaching. *Percutit ut faciat voluntarios, non salvet invitos*—when God smites the consciences of men with the terrors of his threatenings, it is to make them willing, not to save them against their wills (Bern.).

(4.) Let not any person or thing in the world *bribe or scare thee from a faithful discharge of thy trust*. Ambassadors must not be pensioners to a foreign prince. He is unworthy to serve a prince in so honourable an employment that dares not trust his master to defend and reward him. Such a one will not long be faithful to his trust; nor will he in the ministry, that rests not contented with God's promise for his protection or reward. O how soon will he for fear or favour seek to save his stake or mend it, though it be by falsifying his trust to God himself? Blessed Paul was far from this baseness, and hath set a noble pattern to all that shall be God's ambassadors to the end of the world: 'As we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts. For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness,' I Thes. 2:4, 5.

(5.) Be *kind to and tenderly careful of thy fellow-subjects*. Were it not strange if an ambassador, sent from hence to Turkey or Spain, instead of protecting and encouraging the English merchants there in their trade, should hinder their traffic, and employ all the power of his place to their prejudice and damage? Surely this prince sent him not to be an enemy, but a friend and patron, to his good subjects there. The minister, as God's ambassador, is to encourage the saints in their heavenly trade, to assist them by his counsel, and protect them from the scorn that their wicked neighbours cast upon them for their goodness. O how sad is it if he shall bend his ministry against them! if he shall weaken their hands and strengthen the hands of the ungodly, in or out of the pulpit, by his preaching or practice! Better he were, with a millstone tied about his neck, thrown into the sea, than thus to offend these little ones! Moses, he smote the Egyptian, but rescued the Israelite. What account will they make to God of their embassy, who, in the very pulpit, smite the Israelite with their tongues, twitting them for their purity, and stroke the Egyptian—the profane and wicked, I mean, in their congregations—whereby they bless themselves as going to heaven, when, God knows, their feet stand in the ways that will undoubtedly lead them to hell!

[*An argument for Paul's request*, TAKEN  
FROM HIS PRESENT AFFLICTED STATE.]

SECOND ARGUMENT. The second argument with which he stirs them up to his remembrance in their prayers, is *taken from his present afflicted state*—'for which I am an ambassador *in bonds*.' In the Greek |< • 8LF,4—in a chain. When we hear of an ambassador and a chain, we might at first expect it to be a chain of gold about his neck, and not a chain of iron about his leg or arm; yet it is the latter here is meant.

Paul was now a prisoner at Rome, but *in libera custodia*. as is thought by interpreters from this passage—in a chain, not in chains; it being usual there for a prisoner to be committed to the custody of some soldier, with whom he might walk abroad, having a chain on his right arm, which was tied to his keeper's left arm. Such a prisoner, it is conceived, this holy man was now. Paul the lamb was prisoner to Nero the lion, and therefore both needed and desired the church's prayers for him. Many are the OBSERVABLES which this short passage might afford. I shall lightly touch them, but not enlarge upon them.

*[Five observables touched upon,  
from Paul's being in bonds.]*

*First Observable.* Observe the usage which this blessed apostle finds from an ungrateful world. A chain is clapped upon him, as if he were some rogue or thief. He preacheth liberty to poor sinners, and is deprived of his own for his pains; he proclaims deliverance to the captives, and is used like a slave for his labour. One would wonder what they could find against so holy and innocent a person to accuse him for, who made it his daily exercise to live without offence to God and man; yet see what an indictment Tertullus prefers against him, Acts 24, as if there had not been such a pestilent fellow in the whole country as he! And Paul himself tells us he 'suffered trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds,' II Tim. 2:9. Many grievous things were laid to his charge. Whence,

NOTE. *That the best of men may and oft do suffer under the notion of vile and wicked persons.* Let the saints' enemies alone to black their persons and cause. Christ himself must be 'numbered among the transgressors,' and no less than blasphemy be laid to his charge. Persecutors think it not enough to be cruel, but they would be thought just while they are cruel—'Ye have condemned and killed the just,' James 5:6. Here is a bloody murder committed with all the formalities of justice. They condemn first, and then kill; and truly, murder on the bench is worse in God's account than that which is perpetrated by a villain on the highway. Well, there is a time when Paul's cause and the rest of suffering saints' shall have a fairer hearing than here they could meet with, and then it will appear with another complexion than when drawn with their enemies' black-coal. The names of the godly shall have a resurrection as well as their bodies. Now they are buried with their faces downward—their innocency and sincerity charged with many false imputations; but then all shall be set right. And well may the saints stay to be cleared as long as God himself stays to vindicate his own government of the world from the hard speeches of ungodly ones.

*Second Observable.* Observe the true cause of Paul's sufferings. It was his zeal for God and his truth—'for which I am in bonds:' that is, for the gospel which I profess and preach. As that martyr who, being asked how he came into prison, showed his Bible, and said, 'This brought me hither.' Persecutors may pretend what they will, but it their religion and piety that their spite is at. Paul was an honest man, in the opinion

of his countrymen, so long as he was of their opinion, went their way, and did as they did; but when he declared himself to be a Christian, and preached his gospel up, then they cried him down as fast—then his old friends turned new enemies, and all their fists were about his ears. The wicked are but the devil's slaves, and must do as he will have them. Now, it is truth and godliness that pull down his kingdom. When, therefore, these appear in the saints' lives, then he calls forth the wicked world, as a prince would do his subjects into the field, to fight for him; so that it is impossible to get to heaven without blows. 'He that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution:' {II Tim. 3:12} that is, one way or other; and none more than the preacher. He puts his hand into the wasp's nest, and therefore must expect to be stung; he treads on the serpent's head, and it were strange if he should not turn again to bite him. But let not this trouble you. Fear not what you can suffer, only be careful for what you {do} suffer. Christ's cross is made of sweet wood. There are comforts peculiar to those that suffer for righteousness. When Sabina, a Christian martyr, fell in travail in the prison, and was heard to cry and make a dolor in those her child-bearing throes, some asked her how she could endure the torments which her persecutors prepared for her, if she shrank at those? 'O,' saith she, 'now I suffer for sin, then I shall suffer for Christ.'

*Third Observable.* Observe how close Paul sticks to the truth. He will not part with it, though it brings him to trouble. He had rather the persecutor should imprison him for preaching the gospel, than he imprison it by a cowardly silence. He hath cast up his accounts, and is resolved to stand to his profession whatever it may cost him. The truth is, that religion is not worth embracing that cannot bear one's charges in suffering for it; and none but the Christian's is able to do this. Neither is he worth the name of a Christian that dares not take Christ's bill of exchange, to receive in heaven what he is sent out in suffering for his sake on earth. And yet, alas! how hard is it to get faith enough to do this! It is easier to bow at the name, than to stoop to the cross of Jesus. Many like religion for a summer-house, when all is fair and warm abroad in the world; but, when winter comes, doors are shut up, and nobody to be seen in or about it.

*Fourth Observable.* Observe the publication Paul makes of his sufferings to the church. He, being now a prisoner, sends his despatches to this and other churches, to let them know his condition. From whence,

NOTE. That sufferings for the gospel are no matter of shame. Paul doth not blush to tell it is for the gospel he is 'in bonds.' The shame belonged to them that clapped on the chain, not to him that wore it. The thief, the murderer, may justly blush to tell wherefore they suffer, not the Christian for well-doing. 'If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf,' I Peter 4:16. Christ himself counted it no dishonour to have the print of his wounds seen after his resurrection. Babylas, a Christian martyr, would have his chains buried with him. The apostles 'rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name,' Acts 5:41. And if it be no shame to suffer for the gospel, then surely it is none

to profess it, and live up to its holy rules. Shall the wicked 'glory in their shame,' and thou be ashamed of thy glory? Shall they do the devil's work at noonday light, and thou afraid to be seen with the good? Yet Salvian tells us, in his days—so wicked they were, and such a scorn was cast upon holiness—that many carried Christ's colours in their pocket, and concealed their piety, *ne viles haberentur*—lest they should be counted vile and base.

*Fifth Observable.* Observe *the end why he makes known his sufferings.*

1. That they *may know the true cause wherefore he suffered.* Paul's enemies laid heavy things to his charge, and these might haply fly as far as Ephesus. When the saints' are in a suffering condition, Satan is very industrious to defame them, and misrepresent the cause of their troubles to the world, as if it were for no good. Now, though Paul regarded little what the wicked world said of him, yet he desired to stand right in the thoughts of the churches, and therefore acquaints them with the cause of his imprisonment.

2. To *strengthen their faith and comfort their hearts.* No doubt but Paul's chain entered their souls, and his suffering was their sorrow. This he knew, and therefore sends them word by Tychicus—the bearer of this epistle—how it fared with him in his bonds, that they might not spend too many tears for him who had a heart so merry and cheerful in his sufferings: 'That ye might know our affairs, and that he comfort your hearts,' Eph. 6:22. Thus have we seen sometimes a tender-hearted, father on his sick-bed, not so much troubled with his own pains, or thoughts of his approaching death, as to see his children take them so much to heart; and therefore, forgetting his own miseries, address himself with a smiling countenance to comfort them. O it is an excellent sight to behold the saints that are at liberty mourning over their afflicted brethren, and those that are the sufferers become comforters to them that are at liberty! Never doth religion appear more glorious than when they commend it who are suffering for it. And no way can they commend it higher than by a holy humble cheerfulness of spirit in their sufferings. The comfortable which the martyrs in queen Mary's days sent out of prison, did wonderfully strengthen their brethren throughout the kingdom, and fit them for the prison. Sufferers preach with great advantage above others. They do not speak by hearsay, but what they experiment {verified} in themselves.

3. To *engage their prayers for him.* Suffering saints have ever been very covetous of prayers. Paul acts all the churches at work for him. 'Pray, pray, pray,' was the usual close to Mr. Bradford's letters out of prison. And great reason for it; for a suffering condition is full of temptations. When man plays the persecutor, the devil forgets not to be a tempter. He that followed Christ into the wilderness will ever find a way to get to his saints in the prison. Sometimes he will try whether he can soften them for impressions of fear, or make them pity themselves; and he shall not want them that will lend their tears to melt their courage and weaken their resolution—may be wife and children, or friends and neighbours, who wish them well, but are abused by Satan to lay a snare *before* them, while they express their affection *to* them.

No doubt those good people meant well to Paul, who, with tears and passionate entreaties, endeavoured to keep him from Jerusalem—where it was foretold he should come into trouble—but Satan had a design against Paul therein, who hoped they might not only break his heart, but weaken his courage, with their tears. When he cannot make a coward of the saint, to run from the cross; then he will try to sour and swell his spirit with some secret anger against those that laid it on. O it is no easy matter to receive evil, and wish none to him from whose hands we have it. To reserve love for him that shows wrath and hatred to us is a glorious but a difficult work. If he cannot leaven him with wrath against his persecutor, then he will try to blow him up with a high conceit of himself, who dares suffer for Christ, while others shrink in their heads, and seek to keep themselves safe within their own shell. O this pride is a salamander, that can live in the fire of suffering! If any one saint needs the humility of many saints, it is he that is called to suffer. To glory in his sufferings for Christ becomes him well, II Cor. 12:9; Gal. 6:14; but to glory in himself for them is hateful and odious. Needs not he a quick eye, and a steady hand, that is to drive his chariot on the brow of so dangerous a precipice?

In a word, a suffering condition is full of temptations, so the saint's strength to carry him safely through them is *not in his own keeping*. God must help, or the stoutest champion's spirit will soon quail. 'In all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need,' Php. 4:12. This was a hard lesson indeed to learn. Who was his master? See, 'I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me,' ver. 13. Now, as the saints' strength to suffer is not in themselves, but Christ, so prayer is the best means to fetch it in for their help; for by it they confess their own weakness, and so God is secured from having a co-rival in the praise. Which Paul is here free to do, and more than so; for, as he confesseth he can do nothing without Christ's strength to enable and embolden him, so he dares not rely on his own solitary single prayers for the obtaining it, but calls in the auxiliary forces of his fellow-saints to besiege heaven for him; that, while he is in the valley suffering for the gospel, they might be lifting up their hands and hearts in the mount of prayer for him.

The End Of  
"The Christian in Complete Armour"

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<sup>[1]</sup>*Prog*: — to prowl about, as in search of food or plunder; forage. From *Webster's*.

<sup>[2]</sup>The meaning of the word *skill* in this case is probably more in line with either the obsolete meanings of knowledge, understanding, or judgment; or, the archaic meanings of to matter, avail, or make a difference; with the former being the most likely. — SDB

<sup>[3]</sup><sup>14</sup>And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: <sup>15</sup>that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

— John 3

See also the following passage from Numbers:

<sup>4</sup>And they journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way. <sup>5</sup>And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for *there is* no bread, neither *is there any* water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. <sup>6</sup>And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. <sup>7</sup>Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. <sup>8</sup>And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. <sup>9</sup>And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.

— Numbers 21