

Rom. xv. 13, particularly knowing that his kingdom shall prosper over the belly of opposition, yea, that it shall prosper by means that threaten to overthrow it, as in the case of Paul's sufferings, Phil. i. 12; that their particular trials shall promote their prosperity, John xv. 2; and that in him they may have peace in the midst of trouble, John xvi. 33.

3. *Lastly*, Join yourselves to this prosperous and peaceful prince and kingdom. Great is the noise of wars and commotions through the nations, strong confederacies on all hands a-forming. Join ye the Prince of Peace in the covenant of Grace; and ye shall have peace, though all should be in red war, Psalm xlvi. 1—4.

Thus Christ has been directly commended to you.

(1.) Do ye believe the report that has been made of Christ to you from the word, or not? that he is indeed the "Wonderful One, the Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace?" that he is presented, yea, given to you of the Father? If ye do, I am sure the vain world, and your lusts, will be sunk in their value with you. If they be not, it is an evidence it is not believed, Isa. liii. 1.

(2.) Will ye take him or not, for and instead of all? If ye do, let these go away, Luke xiv. 26. He will be your "Wonderful One," your "Counsellor," &c. If ye will not, be it known to you, you refuse Heaven's present to you, you cast back its gift made to you, and ye must answer it.

THE UNSUCCESSFULNESS OF THE GOSPEL, THE NATURE OF THE GOSPEL-REPORT, THE RARITY OF BELIEVING IT, AND THE NECESSITY OF DIVINE POWER IN ORDER TO FAITH.*

ISAIAH liii. 1,

Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?

NONE spoke so much of Christ as this evangelical prophet. He had been speaking of him in the former chapter, verse 13, and downward, and he was to speak more of him here. But in the words now read, he makes a melancholy reflection on the cold entertainment the word met with in his own time, and would meet with in after times.

* Several sermons preached at Ettrick, in the year 1726.

The words are a heavy complaint and lamentation. And if we consider,

1st, To whom it was made. We find from parallel scriptures that it is made to the Lord himself; John xii. 38, Rom. x. 16, "Lord, who hath believed our report?" &c. From powerful preaching he betakes himself to mournful prayer, lamenting the unsuccessfulness of his message.

2dly, Whom it respects. It respects the hearers of the Gospel in his own time, and in after times too; John xii. 37, 38, "But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him; that the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report, and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?" The Jews, to whom Christ himself preached; and both Jews and Gentiles, to whom the apostles preached, Rom. x. 16. No wonder then it extend to those to whom ministers now preach.

3dly, The matter of this heavy lamentation.

1. The unsuccessfulness of the Gospel, and prevailing unbelief among them that heard it. Where consider,

(1.) What the Gospel is. It is a report; a report from heaven, brought by Christ himself, the apostles, and prophets, to be believed unto salvation. The word signifies "a hearing," i.e. a thing to be heard and received by faith, as a voice is received and heard by the ear. Hence is that expression, the hearing of faith, Gal. iii. 2.

(2.) What faith is. It is a believing that report. The word rendered believing, doth properly signify to trust. So it is in the Hebrew, "Who hath trusted to our report?" Faith is a giving credit to the Gospel, and a trusting our souls to it, as on a word that cannot fail.

(3.) How rare that faith is; who hath believed? Few, very few have believed the report. It is brought to multitudes; but where is the man that really trusts it, as news from heaven that may be relied on? They are but here and there one who trust it; the generality regard it but as idle tales.

2. The great withdrawing of the power of God from ordinances; "And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" The arm of the Lord is the power of God; and this arm is said to be revealed or uncovered, when it exerts itself in acting powerfully; as men put up their sleeves when they are putting themselves in order for working with the hand. And this implies three things.

(1.) That there is a necessity of the mighty power of God being exerted on a man, to cause him believe; John vi. 44, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." The trust-

ing to the report of the Gospel is so far from being an easy effort of imagination, that it is beyond the power of nature.

(2.) That few, very few, felt this power. To whom? (Heb.) Upon whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? The Gospel was but an empty sound to the most part; they found not the power of the spirit coming along with it.

(3.) That hence so very few believed. Where there is no feeling of that power, there is no believing. First the arm of the Lord must draw, ere the sinner can come; therefore these two are of equal latitude; Eph. i. 19, "What is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power." Four doctrines are deducible from the words.

DOCTRINE I. The little success of the Gospel, and great rarity of divine power coming along with Gospel ordinances, will be matter of heavy lamentation to the godly, and particularly to godly ministers.

DOCTRINE II. The Gospel is a report from heaven, to be believed and trusted to for salvation.

DOCTRINE III. Though many hear, yet few believe or trust to the report of the Gospel.

DOCTRINE IV. There is no true believing or trusting to the report of the Gospel, but what is the effect of the working of a divine power on the soul for that end.

We shall handle each of these doctrines in order.

DOCTRINE I. The little success of the Gospel, and great rarity of divine power coming along with Gospel ordinances, will be matter of heavy lamentation to the godly, and particularly to godly ministers.

In discoursing this doctrine I shall show,

I. What is that success which the Gospel sometimes hath?

II. What is that divine power which sometimes comes along with Gospel ordinances.

III. Give the reasons of the doctrine.

IV. *Lastly*, Apply.

What is that success which the Gospel sometimes hath? We may take it up in these two generals. It is successful,

1. When sinners are thereby brought to faith in Christ, Rom. i. 17. The Gospel is a good report of Christ the bridegroom of souls, spread in the world; and then the end of it is gained, when the sinner is brought to behold him so altogether lovely, as that he gives up with all his former lovers, and is married to him, to be his only, wholly, and for ever, Psalm lxxiii. 25.

2. When they are thereby brought to holiness of life; when they

are transformed into the image of him in whom they have believed, 2 Cor. iii. 18. It is a holy gospel, and true believers of it are cast into the mould of it, Rom. vi. 17.; and being united to Christ, "put on Christ," Gal. iii. 27, walking as personating him, 1 John ii. 6. These things are so excellent, that it is very lamentable there is so little of them among men.

II. What is that divine power which sometimes comes along with Gospel ordinances? There is,

1. A heart and life discovering power, 1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25. The word comes, and the Lord's arm comes with it, and opens the volume of a man's heart and life; and it is as if the preacher were reading the secret history of a man's thoughts and actions; Heb. iv. 12, "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." This is called the watchman's finding the spouse, Cant. iii. 3.

2. A sharp convincing power, whereby the sinner does not only see his sin, but sees the ill and danger of it, and is touched to the heart with it; Acts xxiv. 25. That is the finger of God at the man's heart, according to John xvi. 7, 8, "When the Spirit is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." So it was with these; Acts ii. 37, "They were pricked in their heart, and said, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" And O, it is promising when men are sent home with a breast full of convictions from the word. But if that arm of the Lord be not revealed, one will be very easy, come the word never so close to his case.

3. A drawing and converting power; John xii. 32, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." Psalm xix. 7, "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul." While the word comes, some secret power comes along, that the man is not able to resist it; but the iron gate of the heart is loosed, and of its own accord opens wide, to receive the King of glory. Such a power Zaccheus felt with that word, "Come down," that made his heart, which was like a strong castle to keep out Christ, come as fast down, as ever an old house did being undermined; Luke xix. 5. While this comes not, sinners will not come to Christ; John v. 40.

4. A quickening power; Psalm cxix. 50, "Thy word hath quickened me." Sometimes the spiritual senses have all been bound up, that the soul could neither see, hear, taste, smell, nor feel spiritually, more than it had been dead; and a word has been dropt in with such a power, that it has been like the barley-cake tumbling down on the tents of Midian, or like the honey Jonathan tasted in the

wood; it has cleared their eyes, unstopped their ears, &c. Cant. vii. 9. While this is wanting, the word cannot awaken people.

5. A clearing power, resolving doubts, removing mistakes and darkness in certain particulars, whereby one is retarded in their spiritual course; Psalm xix. 7, 8. Many a time souls have been so embarrassed with some doubts or mistakes, that they have thereby been made to go like a fettered bird, perhaps many a day and year; till at length they have got a word with such power, that it has made these their fetters fall off, like Peter's chains when the angel gave him a touch on the side; Acts xii. 7. Cornelius had sweet experience of it; Acts x. 6—44. While the power comes not, they come and go with their chains on them.

6. A comforting power; Psalm cxix, 49, 50, "Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope. This is my comfort in my affliction; for thy word hath quickened me." Discouragement is a great load; the discouraged soul is like one going with a clog at his heels. Great pressures of affliction are apt to discourage, make the heart faint, the hands weak, and the knees feeble; but sometimes the word comes with such power, as that it stays the fainting soul; Psalm cxix. 92, "Unless thy law had been my delight, I should then have perished in my affliction." Sometimes such a high spring-tide of power comes with the word, that the clog drops off, and the affliction that was so heavy is not the weight of a feather, but the man rejoices in the Lord, and leaps like an hart; Isa. xii. 3. For the comfort of the word has loosed all his bands; Rom. xv. 13; Heb. x. 34.

7. A strengthening power; Psalm xcvi. 6, "Strength and beauty are in his sanctuary." Sometimes a man has great temptations to conflict with, and he knows not how to stand before them; till he come to the sanctuary with Asaph; Psalm lxxiii. 16, 17, and with Paul get a word with power; 2 Cor. xii. 7. Then he is like a giant refreshed with wine, and in the strength of that word goes out like David against Goliath. The Spirit with the word breathing on the dry bones, makes them stand on their feet like a great army.

8. *Lastly*, A soul-elevating and heart-ravishing power; Luke xxiv. 32, "Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?" Sometimes such a power has come along with the word, as if in heaven, not a window only, but a door had been opened; that the man has made no doubt to say, Gen. xxviii. 16, 17, "Surely the Lord is in this place.—This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." And Christ has come so near him, as he could tell what was the smell of his garments; Psalm xlv. 8; and the

sermon or communion place would have been gladly embraced as the dying place ; Luke ii. 29.

III. The *third* thing is, The reasons of the point. And,

1st, It must be matter of lamentation to the godly in general. For,

1. The honour of Christ is thereby overclouded. He is not honoured, but highly dishonoured by sinners disbelieving the report of him, not receiving him in the gospel-offer ; John viii. 49. Hence it was a part of Christ's humiliation, that his report out of his own mouth was not believed ; John xii. 37, 38 ; and after his exaltation his apostles were to do greater works than he ; John xiv, 12. And when he goes forth in the gospel conquering, a crown is said to be given him ; Rev. vi. 2. But that crown is obscured in a time of the gospel's unsuccessfulness. And Christ's honour will be dear to the godly, whatever it be to others ; and the affronts done him by unbelievers, will lie near their hearts.

2. The glory of the glorious gospel is thereby veiled. The gospel is in itself glorious ; 2 Cor. iv. 4 ; 1 Tim. i. 11. It is a radiant jewel, of greater worth than all the glory of the world ; but the glory of it is hid, while it is not believed, and divine power does not accompany it ; therefore having " free course," it is said to be " glorified," 2 Thess. iii. 1. And this cannot but affect the godly, who relish the gospel.

3. Souls are thereby lost, while salvation is come to their door. The gospel brings salvation ; but none can share of it where it is not believed ; Heb. iv. 2. What a lamentable sight it is to see men slighting and despising their own misery ; neglecting the great salvation ; continuing filthy still under means of cleansing ; growing worse, by the means of grace doing them no good ; and finally, aggravating their own condemnation ; John xv. 22.

4. The godly themselves suffer loss. The thronger Christ's family is, the better thriven are the children ; and contrariwise. The calling of the Jews will be as " life from the dead ;" Rom. xi. 15. The saints in the worst of times will always get as much as will keep in their life ; Micah ii. 7. But there is a difference between fend and fare well. If there were more converting, there would be more confirming work too.

2dly, And particularly to godly ministers. For,

1. Thereby their care and pains is much lost, and in vain. To toil all night and catch nothing, is a heavy task. Ministers are like candles ; while they give light to others, they waste themselves. And that is a heavy tale ; Isa. xlix. 4, " I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain." O there is much

need of faith in the work of the ministry! The husbandman, shepherd and tradesman, sees ordinarily the fruit of his labours; if it miss at one time, it will readily prosper at another; but there is much spiritual seed sown, where there is no visible fruit.

2. Thereby their work is rendered more difficult and wearisome. When the arm of the Lord is revealed to carry on the work on men's souls and consciences, it is made lightsome; they are then like a ship going with a fair wind. But when the Spirit is withdrawn, they are like the ship in a dead calm, that takes much strength to work her, and yet she comes but little speed.

3. *Lastly*, Thereby the seals of their ministry are but small. They are the savour of death to many, the savour of life to few; for the one or the other they will be to all; 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16. If they be not, by men's receiving their testimony, instruments to further their salvation, they will be witnesses against them, to aggravate their condemnation.

Usm. Then let it teach our hearts, and cause us to lament, that there is so little success of the gospel, and so great a rarity of divine power coming along with ordinances at this day in the land, and among us. Of this there are several evidences.

EVIDENCE 1. The slighting of gospel-ordinances that so much prevails. How easy is it for many to sit at home, and make to themselves silent Sabbaths, while the Lord puts an opportunity in their hands to attend ordinances! for others if they be but touched against the grain, and disobliged, to cast them off for good and all! A sad evidence the gospel has had little success or power with them; for the experience of the power would give men a higher value for them than to neglect them; Psalm lxxiii. 1, 2, and lxxxiv. 1—3.

2. Little reformation of life under the dispensation of the gospel. Ministers may say with Jeremiah; chap. vi. 10, "To whom shall I speak and give warning, that they may hear? behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken; behold, the word of the Lord is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it. He that was filthy, is filthy still." The glass of the word is held before men's eyes, that they cannot but see their spots; yet do they not wipe them off. Under the gospel of the grace of God they live ungodly lives; in the land of uprightness they deal unjustly; rebelling against the light.

3. Much formality in attendance on ordinances; Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32. People satisfy themselves with the work done. Few take heed how they hear. They seek not to be spiritual in the work, to have communion with God in ordinances, nor do they mourn when they obtain it not. They do not miss the power of God in ordinances; or if they do, they can easily bear the want.

4. *Lastly*, Little of the work of conversion or soul-exercise in our day. The gospel is the great mean of conversion, of bringing sinners into a state of grace; but converts are rare. Conviction, compunction, and humiliation, are rarely made now by the word; and rarely issued in kindly conversion to God. Sometime the word would have raised soul-exercise in them that heard it, and the word again would have brought the Christian's exercise to a happy issue; but, alas! that is seldom the case now.

Now this may be for a lamentation, that it is so; that there is so little success attending the dispensation of gospel-ordinances, and that there is a great rarity of divine power coming along with them. For,

1. This says, that the Lord is in a great measure departed from us, ministers and people; Isa. lxiv. 7, "There is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee; for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities." We may lament, that he is become "as a stranger in the land;" Jer. xiv. 8. Ordinances are the trysting-places where he is to be met with; and when he is so little found there, it is time to lament his departure. We may say, as 2 Kings ii. 14, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" We have the chair of state; but where is the King himself? Here is the napkin and linen clothes lying, but where is the Lord that was wrapt in them?

2. That we have sinned away his presence; Isa. lix. 1, 2, "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear." When the glory departed to the threshold, Ezek. x. 4, from the threshold, ver. 18, from the midst of the city to the mountain, chap. xi. 23, it was for the abominations done in the house; chap. viii. Why doth he loath our sacrifices, refuse to smell in our assemblies, but because we have made ourselves and them vile before him? Isaiah i. 11—17. Had we entertained the blowings of his Spirit when we had them, he had not left us in such a dead calm.

3. That the Lord has a controversy with us, that we are not yet convinced of, and humbled for; Hos. v. 15. People may be long under the Lord's withdrawals, so far insensible of the causes thereof, as not to be lamenting over them; 1 Sam. vii. 2. Now there is no convincing us of the causes of God's controversy. But if ever the Lord return to ordinances as heretofore, ye will see there will be a convincing and humbling influence, that will bring ministers and people to their knees, taking shame to themselves.

4. That wrath and heavy judgments are abiding us, come from what airth they will; Matth. iii. 10. It is not to be thought, that

the contempt of the gospel, and unfruitfulness under it, will be passed without some special mark of the divine indignation. When the invitations to the gospel feast prevail not, the King's armies are sent forth to destroy; Matth. xxii. 7. When the white flag of peace is contemned, the red flag of war is hung out.

5. That these judgments will be very sore when they come, according to the measure of light sinned against. Capernaum exalted to heaven, is thrust down to hell; Matth. xi. 23. After the white horse, the red and black follow; Rev. vi. Never did a generation enjoy such a clear light of the gospel as the Jews in the time of our Saviour and the apostles, and accordingly wrath came to an extremity, to the uttermost; 1 Thess. ii. 16.

6. *Lastly*, That it is high time to be lamenting after the Lord, and wrestling and supplicating for his return to ordinances. Stir up yourselves therefore unto this, that it be not said as Isaiah lxiv. 7, "There is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee." Consider,

1. It is a sad sign to be unconcerned about it. It speaks, (1.) Such a one to be a stranger to the experience of the power of the word, and the precious enjoyment of communion with God in ordinances; Psalm lxiii. 1, 2. (2.) To be too easily satisfied in the matters of God with the husks, the shadows, instead of the foyson and substance. (3.) To be unacquainted with Christ, and none of his; since the withdrawing of his presence is not heavy to him. (4.) That they could even be content Christ would never come again; for they that relish not his coming in ordinances, can never relish his second coming.

2. Great would be the advantage of his return to ordinances. (1.) It would be well for particular hearers of the gospel who should share in it themselves. Strangers would be converted, and converts strengthened. Duties would be a delight. Whereas a form of godliness is all that can be reached otherwise. (2.) It would be well for the church in general; it would cure our divisions; all being by that means brought to acknowledge their offences, and return to the Lord, and so to one another in him.

DOCTRINE II. The gospel is a report from heaven to be believed and trusted to for salvation.

In prosecuting this doctrine, I shall consider,

I. The gospel as it is a report.

II. Faith as it is a trusting to this report.

III. The report of the gospel, and the trusting to it, conjunctly.

IV. *Lastly*, Apply.

I. We shall consider the gospel as it is a report. And here we shall view it,

1st, In the nature of a report in general.

2dly, In the nature of a report to be trusted to, for some valuable end.

First, We shall view the gospel in the nature of a report in general. And,

1. There is the subject of a report, or the thing that is reported, viz. some design, action, or event, true or false. The subject of the gospel-report is, a love-design in God for the salvation of sinners of mankind, 2 Tim. i. 9, 10. Such was the gospel-report that was first made in the world, Gen. iii. 15. It is the report of an act of grace and kindness in God, in favour of them, whereby he has given them his Son for a Saviour, John iii. 16, Isa. ix. 6, and eternal life in him, 1 John v. 11. The report of the event of Christ's dying for sinners, and a crucified Christ's being ready for marriage with sinners; Matth. xxii. 4. A subject of the utmost importance.

2. There is the place whence the report originally comes. And the place here is heaven, the bosom of the Father. Hence the gospel is called heavenly things; John iii. 12, revealed from the bosom of the Father. The original place of a report is the place of the transaction, and that at some distance from where it is reported. So,

(1.) The gospel is a report from heaven, where the design of love was contrived, the gift of the Son was made, and from whence he came to die for sinners, and where he is ready to match with them. The gospel may come from one place of the earth to another, as it did from Jerusalem to other places of the world; Isa. ii. 3; Luke xxiv. 47. But it came from heaven originally, Luke ii. 13, 14.

(2.) The gospel is good news from a far country, and so should be as acceptable as cold water to the thirsty; Prov. xxv. 25. The farther off a country is from whence a report comes, we think ourselves the less concerned in it; and so do carnal men treat the gospel-report. Far indeed it is; but as far as it is, we must spend our eternity in it, or else in hel!; and therefore it does most nearly concern us.

3. The matter of a report is something unseen to them to whom the report is made. And so is the matter of the gospel-report. It is an unseen God, John i. 18; an unseen Saviour, 1 Pet. i. 8; and unseen things, 2 Cor. iv. 18, that are preached unto you by the gospel. So the gospel is an object of faith, not of sight; Heb. xi. 1. We receive it by hearing, not by seeing; Isa. lv. 3. It is not what we credit on our eye-sight, but upon the testimony of another, viz.

of God. Hence the carnal world are fond on seen objects ; Psalm iv. 6. but slow to believe the gospel.

4. There is a reporter or reporters. And in this case the report is made by many. But,

(1.) The first-hand reporter is an eye-witness, viz. Jesus Christ. Christ himself was the raiser of the report of the gospel ; Heb. ii. 3. And who else could have been so ? John i. 18. What he reported he saw, and gives us his testimony of the truth of it on his eyesight ; John iii. 11. Hence he is proposed to us as the faithful and true witness ; Rev. iii. 14. who was from eternity privy to the whole design revealed to us in the gospel.

(2.) The prophets and apostles, and ministers of the gospel. They are the second-hand reporters. The former had it immediately from Christ, the latter from them again. But none of them were eye-witnesses, but ear-witnesses properly speaking. For even the apostles who saw Christ with their eyes, yet owed their knowledge of the gospel to their faith originally, though they were confirmed by what they saw ; John i. 14. So it is determined ; Psalm lxxviii. 11, "The Lord gave the word ; great was the company of those that published it."

5. *Lastly*, There is a manifestation of the thing by the report, to the parties to whom the report is made. So is the grace of God to poor sinners, manifested to them by the gospel ; 2 Tim. i. 9, 10. It is no more kept a secret from them, but they are let into the knowledge of the design, action, and events, which concern their salvation. The gospel opens up and reveals the secret of God's grace to sinners, with the method of communicating it, even the whole plan of salvation, which from eternity was hid in the breast of God, John i. 18. Let us view the gospel,

Secondly, In the nature of a report to be trusted to, for some valuable end. And so it is,

1. A true and faithful report, that one may safely trust ; 1 Tim. i. 15, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." It was originally brought from heaven by Jesus Christ ; Heb. ii. 3. the faithful and true witness ; Rev. iii. 14. Many false reports are going in the world ; and those that are brought from afar, we are not in capacity to contradict ; but the truth of the gospel has been confirmed by the greatest evidence, particularly by the death of Christ, and by the experience of the believers of it in all ages.

2. An infallible report. A report may be true where there is no infallibility ; but the report of the gospel is an infallible truth, Acts i. 3, for it is the word of God that cannot lie ; 1 Thess. ii. 13.

Though men bring it to you, God has put it in their mouths from his written word; and the speaker is Christ himself, they are but the voice. And the Spirit of the Lord demonstrates it to believers, as divine truth; 1 Cor. ii. 4.

3. A good and comfortable report. It is not only good in itself, as the report of the law's curse is; but it is good for us. Hence it is called good or glad tidings, Luke ii. 10. As the contrivance of salvation is stated in the gospel, it is adapted in all points to our case. And the convinced sinner, helped to believe, sees it so; that it is a good report of God, bringing the contrivance every way good for him.

(4.) *Lastly*, A weighty report, even of the greatest weight, as concerning man's greatest possible interest, Isa. lxi. 1. It concerns a man's eternal interest, how he may be saved from the wrath of God, and made happy for evermore.

II. We shall consider faith as it is a trusting to this report, the report of the gospel. And so it is not only divine faith, but saving justifying faith, Rom. x. 8, 9. It may be taken up in these two. Faith is,

1st, A trusting of the gospel-report as true. It is a believing of the doctrine of the gospel; Acts viii. 37. Faith is the soul's echo to the joyful sound. That Christ came to save sinners is true, saith the gospel; true, saith faith. Hence the gospel is called a hearing in our text, and the hearing of faith; Gal. iii. 2. The voice from without entering the ear, is conceived and sounds there; the voice of the gospel entering the heart, is conceived and sounds like an echo, from the heart; and that is faith; Rom. x. 9. When a word is heard that one does not believe, there is as it were a repelling it from within; and it is all one to the purpose of the speaker, as if it were not heard at all. So unbelief repels the gospel-testimony, receives it not as true; 1 John v. 10. But faith receives it as true; and the speaker so far gains his design. And faith trusts it as true,

1. In the general, with respect to the multitude whom it concerns; 1 Tim. i. 15, "It is a faithful saying, Christ came to save sinners." Here is the gospel; here is faith's assent to it as true with respect to sinners in general. It is the report of a common good, the common salvation for sinners of mankind. The great body of mankind looks on it as idle tales; but faith receives it as a true report; and admires the love of God to fallen man, and not to fallen angels.

2. In particular, with respect to one's self; 1 Tim. i. 15, "This is a faithful saying, that Christ came to save sinners; of whom I am the chief." Here is the application of faith, without which the report of the gospel is not trusted as true; He came to save me.

Faith believes there is a fulness in Christ for poor sinners, and for one's self in particular; that Christ and all his salvation is in earnest offered to sinners, and to one's self in particular; that he is the Saviour of the world, and their Saviour in particular, John iv. 42, "We know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the; world." Chap xx. 28, "Thomas said unto him, My Lord and my God." This is evident, if ye consider, that the gospel comprehends you, and every one of you; John iii. 16, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life." Prov. viii. 4, "Unto you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of man." If then you do not believe it with respect to yourself, if you should believe it with respect to all the world besides, ye disbelieve it; ye deny credit to it, in that which is the main point for your salvation; 1 John v. 10. 11. You believe in that case no more than devils do; Mark i. 24. Nay, you do not believe so much as the devils do; for they cannot help believing your interest in the gospel, as well as the interest of others: and therefore are at so much pains to keep you from believing it, lest ye be saved; if ye had no interest in it, they would tell you so much for your torment.

OBJECT. But where is it written in the gospel, that Christ came to save me, or that he is my Saviour? I am sure my name is not in it. I may believe the gospel then, though I do not believe it to hold with respect to myself.

ANSW. Where is it written in the law, that Adam ruined you? I am sure your name is neither in the commands of the law, nor in the curse of it either. But do you think you could indeed believe the law, without believing its commands and curses reaching you? No; if ye believe not that, you contradict the express terms of the law; Gal. iii. 10, "For as many as are of the works of the law, are under the curse; for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." O, but say ye, I am comprehended in the curse as a breaker of the law; true, but are ye not as much comprehended in the gospel as a son of Adam? Prov. viii. 4; is not the promise of the gospel in as extensive terms (John iii. 16,) as the curse of the law?

Wherefore, let none deceive themselves, thinking they believe the gospel, while they believe it not with particular application to themselves. True faith trusts the gospel as true, with respect to one's self; and so trusts it,

1. As certain truth. It does not receive the gospel-report only as a thing that is probable, and likely to be true. That is opinion and conjecture, not faith. Faith embraceth the gospel as certain truth,

as a thing one is sure there is no falsehood in ; John vi. 69, " We believe, and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." Paul was so much persuaded of the truth of the gospel, that he could declare an angel accursed that should contradict it ; Gal. i. 8, 9.

2. As infallible truth, as a thing there can be no falsehood in. The reason of which is, That faith trusts the gospel as the testimony of God himself that cannot lie, 1 Thess. ii. 13. It receives the joyful sound as the voice of God, John iii. 33. To believe the gospel because good ministers and good books say so, or because it appears agreeable to our reason, is not faith, but opinion. Faith believes it, because God says so. The tidings of the gospel are beyond our sight, and above our reason, as the mystery of an incarnate God, an imputed righteousness, &c. But because we see the divine testimony for these things, therefore we believe them by true faith, just on the credit of God's word, Mark xvi. 15. Hence it appears,

1. That there is an assurance in the nature of faith, whereby the believing person is sure of the truth of the doctrine of the gospel, and that with respect to himself particularly ; 1 Thess. i. 2, " For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." So that whatever were his doubts of it, and carnal reasonings against it, he is brought at length to assent thereto as most firm truth.

2. That there is a necessity of an inward illumination by the Spirit, in order to the faith of the gospel, 1 Cor. ii. 14, 10, " The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God ; for they are foolishness unto him ; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit." The Spirit of the Lord opens the eyes, and demonstrates the truth of the gospel to the soul ; ver. 4, " My speech and my preaching, was—in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power ;" otherwise there is no reaching the divine faith of it ; ver. 5, " That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." This casts down the man's carnal reasonings against it, and awes him and overcomes him into a belief of the truth ; 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.

QUEST. Is there no doubting then consistent with the faith of the report of the gospel ? ANSW. All doubting is contrary to faith ; Matth. xxi. 21. But since faith is not perfect more than other graces, it may have a mixture of its contrary ; chap. xiv. 31, " O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt ?" Howbeit, the more doubting, the less faith ; and the more faith, the less doubting. As long as doubting is predominant in the soul to be brought to Christ, there is no faith. But the Spirit of the Lord lays in a weight

of light, and the balance is cast on the side of the truth of the gospel, and the doubting is downweighed, and faith springs up in the soul. The soul is assured of the truth of the gospel, appearing in his venturing himself for eternity upon it, in the sight of a holy, just God; though perhaps he is not without all doubting; as there may be a moving of the heavier scale by the lighter weight, though the balance is fully casten.

2dly, There is in faith a trusting to the gospel-report as good. Faith does not only trust the gospel, but trusts to it, trusts much to it, lays stress on it, not only as a true, but also as a good thing. Faith,

1. Looks on the gospel as a good thing in itself, and desirable. For it is done with the heart; Rom. x 10. Look how a Saviour, a righteousness, and a pardon, must needs be good things in the eyes of sinners seeing themselves lost; so the gospel that brings these to sinners, must needs appear good. As the belief of the report of the law, imports not only an assent to it as true, but a horror of it as evil; so the belief of the report of the gospel imports not only an assent thereto as true, but a relish thereof as good. So it is holden out to faith under the notion of good; Isaiah Iv. 2, "Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness."

2. Faith looks on the gospel as good for one's self in particular. The believing soul says, This is good news, and good for me; 1 Tim. i. 15, "Worthy of all acceptation." When there is a report of a physician come to a country that infallibly cures such and such a disease, the whole people say, That is good; but the sick of these diseases say more, That is good for me. What makes one think a thing good for him, is the suitableness of it to his mind and case. Many hearers of the Gospel may account the Gospel good in itself, but they do not look on it as good for them, at least as yet: as one who may account some kind of meat good, but he is not for it. He has better before him, more agreeable to his stomach; or perhaps he has no stomach for the time, so it must be set up. Thus Christ is good, and his salvation; but the man has the world and his lusts to feed on, that are more agreeable to him; let them stay off till death, and then he will be for them. But the Gospel is to the believer not only good in itself, but good for him, and that just now.

And so he trusts to it as good for him. And if ye ask, what it is that he trusts to it? Why, he trusts his salvation to it, in a word; for that is it the gospel brings to sinners, Tit. ii. 11. marg. "The grace of God that bringeth salvation to all men, hath appeared." And the trust of faith relates to it; Eph. i. 12, 13, "That we should

be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation." The soul sees itself lost; the gospel offers salvation. And faith thereupon trusts for it, Acts xvi. 31. Even for Christ's whole salvation. Which may be taken up in these two.

1. The relative part of it; which comprehends the soul's justification, reconciliation, adoption, and all other benefits of the like kind. These the gospel offers, together with the righteousness of Christ, upon which they are founded; and faith trusts to it for all these; Rom. i. 17, "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith."

2. The real part of it; which comprehends the soul's sanctification and glorification, and all other benefits of that kind. These also the gospel offers, together with the Spirit of Christ, by whom they are to be wrought in sinners; and faith trusts to it for all these, Gal. iii. 2.

Thus faith lays the greatest of weight on the report of the gospel, even the weight of the man's salvation for time and eternity; dealing with God for that his greatest interest, in the way of trust on his word of the gospel; trusting to that report for his own salvation in particular; Acts xv. 11, "But we believe, that, through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be saved."

Now, as faith is a trusting to the report of the gospel for one's own salvation, according as salvation is offered in the gospel, it implies these following things.

1. Not only a willingness, but a sincere desire to be sanctified, and delivered from sin, as well as to be justified, and delivered from wrath; to be delivered from the reigning power, practice, pollution, and inbeing of sin, as well as from the guilt of it; Rom. vii. 24, 25, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death! I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." A person may fear from one what he does not desire; but what he desires not, he cannot trust in one for. Therefore where there is no such desire, there is no trusting to the gospel, there is no faith.

2. A renouncing of all other confidence for his salvation. Faith trusting to the report of the gospel, quits self-confidence, law-confidence, and creature-confidence; Jer. xvi. 19, "O Lord, my strength and my fortress, and my refuge in the day of affliction, the Gentiles shall come unto thee from the ends of the earth, and shall say, Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit." Phil. iii. 3, "We are the circumcision, which have no confidence in the flesh?" like the woman with the bloody issue, who quit all her physicians, trusting for healing to a touch of the hem of Christ's garment.

3. A hearty approbation of the way of salvation manifested in the report of the gospel; Matth. xi. 6, "Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me." Faith here views Christ in the glass of the gospel as a crucified Saviour; 1 Cor. ii. 2; believes his sufficiency as such to save sinners, and them in particular, from sin, and from the wrath of a holy God, in the eye of the holy law, and to make them completely holy and happy; Phil. iii. 9; and acquiesceth in that way for their own salvation; 1 Cor. i. 24.

4. A betaking one's self entirely to that way of salvation, by trusting to it wholly for our own salvation; Ruth ii. 12. Even as a poor beggar, having riches and wealth made over to him by his friend, leaves off his begging, and betakes himself to that entirely for his throughbearing. This is the soul's coming to Christ, fleeing for refuge, receiving the atonement, and rolling its burden on him.

5. *Lastly*, A confidence and trust that he will save us from sin and wrath, according to his promise; Acts xv. 11, "We believe, that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be saved." This is that trust which shall never be disappointed; Rom. x. 11, that building on Christ which shall never fall; 1 Pet. ii. 6.

III. We shall consider the report of the gospel, and the trusting to it conjunctly.

1. The gospel is a report from heaven, of salvation for poor sinners, from sin; Matth. i. 21; and from the wrath of God; John iii. 16, however dear bought, yet freely made over to you in the word of promise; so as that ye may freely take possession of it; Isaiah lv. 1.

This report being brought to the sinner, faith trusts it as a true report, believing that God has said it; and trusts to it as good, laying our own salvation upon it. So the soul greedily embraceth the Saviour, and the salvation brought to it in that report, as ever a drowning man would take hold of a rope let down to bring him out of the waters; Cant. i. 3.

2. The gospel is the report of a crucified Christ made over to sinners, as the device of heaven for their salvation. It is proclaimed by the authority of heaven that Christ has died, and by his death purchased life and salvation for lost children of Adam; and that they and every one of them may have full and free access to him; Matth. xxii. 4.

Faith trusting this report as good and true, the soul concludes, The Saviour is mine; and leans on him for all the purchase of his death, for life and salvation to itself in particular; 1 Cor. ii. 2.

3. The gospel is the report of a righteousness wherein we guilty ones may stand before a holy God; Rom. i. 17, "For therein is the

righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith." And by faith one believes there is such a righteousness, that it is sufficient to cover him, and that is held out to him to be trusted on for righteousness; and so the believer trusts it as his righteousness in the sight of God, disclaiming all other, and betaking himself to it alone; Gal. ii. 16.

4. The gospel is the report of a pardon under the great seal of heaven, in Christ, to all who will take it in him; Acts xiii. 38, 39, "Be it known unto you that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him all that believe are justified from all things." This pardon is proclaimed openly by the authority of Heaven, full and free, without exception of any of lost Adam's race, to whom the report comes.

The soul by faith believes this to be true, and applies it to itself, saying, This pardon is for me; it is good and suitable to my case; I will therefore lean to this word of grace for my pardon, and come in, for this is the word of God that cannot lie.

5. The gospel is the report of a Physician that cures infallibly all the diseases of the soul; Matth. ix. 12, 13; Heb. vii. 26, and freely; Hos. xiv. 4; and rejects no patients; John vi. 37.

The soul believes it, and applies it to its own case; and says, Then I will trust him for the removing the stony heart out of my flesh, for curing me of the falling evil of backsliding, the fever of raging corruption, the running issue of the predominant lust, and the universal leprosy of the corruption of my nature.

6. The gospel is the report of a feast for hungry souls, Isa. xxv. 6, to which all are bid welcome, Christ himself being the maker and matter of it too; Isa. lv. 2.

The soul, weary of the husks of created things, and believing this report, accordingly falls a-feeding on Christ, his flesh which is meat indeed, and his blood which is drink indeed; believing and applying to itself all that Christ was, did, and suffered, as that whereof the soul shall reap the benefit; which is the feeding by faith on a slain Saviour.

7. The gospel is the report of a treasure; 2 Cor. iv. 7. In it are the precious promises, within them precious Christ, with his merit, like the gold mentioned; Rev. iii. 18, "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayst be rich." The field it is hid in, may be yours; Matth. xiii. 44; the gospel offers you the covenant as that field.

Faith believes the report; and the soul lays hold on the covenant, and trusts entirely to the treasure hid there for the payment of all its debt, for its throughbearing during life, and through death, and for procuring it eternal happiness.

8. The gospel is the report of a victory won by Jesus Christ over sin, Satan, and death, and the world; Psalm xcvi. 1, and that in favour of all that will join the glorious Conqueror.

Faith believes this report; and the soul trusts to it for its victory over all these, as already foiled enemies; 1 John v. 4. To name no more,

9, *Lastly*, The gospel is the report of a peace purchased by the blood of Christ for poor sinners; Eph. ii. 14, and offered to them; Isa. xxvii. 5.

Faith believes it; and trusting to it, the soul comes before God as a reconciled Father in Christ, brings in its supplications for supply before the throne, believing the communication to be opened betwixt heaven and them, which during the war was blocked up.

USE 1. Of information. This shews, that,

1. The gospel is the mean of divine appointment for the salvation of sinners. Therefore it is called "the gospel of our salvation," Eph. i. 13, and to "bring salvation," Tit. ii. 11. The light of nature is not the external mean or instrument of salvation; for it brings no report of Christ; Acts iv. 12. The law is not it neither; it is the "ministration of death and condemnation;" 2 Cor. iii. 7, 9; but the gospel only; for it is in the gospel only that a righteousness is revealed for the unrighteous; Rom. i. 16, 17, and in which the Spirit is conveyed to dead sinners; Gal. iii. 2. To slight the gospel, then, is to slight the only mean of salvation.

2. The gospel, however, will not be of any saving effect to us without faith; Heb. iv. 2, "The word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it." The gospel is the net; but the soul is not caught, to be drawn out of the waters of wrath, until it believe; 1 Cor. i. 21, "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." If the gospel be hid to us, it is an evidence we are yet lost; and it remains hid to all unbelievers, who see not the truth, goodness, nor glory of the gospel.

3. The gospel-method of salvation takes away all ground of glorying in the least, from the sinner; for it is by the faith of the gospel; Rom. iv. 16, "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace." The way how a sinner is to be brought into a state of salvation, is not by doing of a law, or any work of a law; but by believing or trusting to a report. Faith is a believing or trusting, which of all things is the farthest removed from the nature of a work; and it is an injury done to the free grace of God, to look upon it as a work, or to explain it so, as hardly to leave any believing or trusting in it.

USE 2. Of exhortation. Let the gospel gain trust with you, as ever ye would be saved from sin and wrath. And,

1st, Trust the gospel as true, as universally true, and that certainly and infallibly, as from God himself.

MOTIVE 1. Consider the manner of its discovery, clearly appearing to be from God, being delivered by Jesus Christ and his apostles. It is a doctrine confirmed by the life and death of Christ, and particularly by his resurrection from the dead ; by the miracles wrought by him and his apostles ; John iii. 2.

MOTIVE 2. Consider the manner of its propagation in the world. It overturned Judaism and Paganism, the only two religions in the world when it entered ; and that neither by the subtlety of men and human learning, nor by the force of arms ; but by the means of a few fishermen, declaring it in its simplicity ; against whom the learning of the schools, and the power of the magistrate and sword, were engaged.

MOTIVE 3. *Lastly*, Consider its effects on men, subduing their lusts, rendering them holy as God is holy ; causing them to embrace it, over the belly of their worldly interest, and in spite of all hazards set before them by its enemies ; and carrying them up comfortably in the midst of the most cruel death.

2dly, Trust to it, and lay the stress of your salvation on it as good. For which cause consider,

1. It discovers a righteousness in which a sinner may stand before a holy God ; Rom. i. 17. The law requires righteousness, a perfect righteousness, under the pain of the curse, Gal. iii. 10, but it affords none, nor any strength whereby it may be wrought ; but the gospel tells us of a righteousness already wrought, and offers it to the sinner ; Rom. viii. 3, 4, " For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us." And in it there is what, in the eye of the law, will justify the sinner before God, and give perfect peace in one's own conscience ; Rom. v. 1, " Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

2. It sets before us the most glorious life of most perfect happiness, in the clearest and surest way ; 2 Tim. i. 10. The brightest scheme of happiness and the most illuminated map of Immanuel's land, is therein laid before us ; fit to draw men's hearts to it, over the belly of all opposition. The researches of happiness made by moralists were as midnight darkness ; the discoveries of it in the Mosaic dispensation were but as the twilight ; but in the gospel as the mid-day.

3. *Lastly*, It is the only channel of salvation, in which salvation

is conveyed to lost sinners; Acts iv. 12, "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." And,

1. It is the channel of salvation, to which whosoever do betake themselves by faith, shall undoubtedly be saved; Rom. i. 16, "The gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." There they shall find quickening, sanctifying, and saving influences; as by a mean appointed of God for that very end.

2. There is no other channel of salvation, no not the law as contradistinguished thereto; 2 Cor. iii. It was the channel of life to innocent man once; but to a sinner never. When sin entered, it quite dried up as to all streams of life; Gal. ii. 16, "By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." In a sinking state of the church, the law and gospel are confounded, and the law jostles out the gospel, the dark shades of morality take place of gospel light; which plague is this day begun in this church, and well far advanced. Men think they see the fitness of legal preaching for sanctification; but how the preaching of the gospel should be such a mean, they cannot understand, through want of experience of the power of the gospel on their own souls. But,

(1.) The gospel, and not the law, has the word of divine appointment for that end; Eph. i. 13, "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise." It is the word of salvation, Acts xiii. 26; the word of grace, chap. xx. 32; and the word of life, Phil. ii. 16. But the law, as contradistinguished to it, is under no such appointment; but is the ministration of condemnation and death, 2 Cor. iii. 7, 9. Abana and Pharpar seemed as fit in the eyes of carnal men to cure a leper as Jordan; but Jordan had the word of divine appointment. And without such an appointment nothing can avail.

(2.) The gospel and not the law as contradistinguished thereto has the blessing annexed to it. There, and only there, is the power of God to salvation to be expected; Rom. i. 16. It alone is the ministration of the Spirit; 2 Cor. iii. 8. So the apostle could appeal to the experience of the Galatians; Gal. iii. 2, "This only," says he, "would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" Now, that can never be the channel of salvation from which the Spirit is separated.

Wherefore know, that your life lies here, and that there is no salvation but in the way of trusting to the report of the gospel.

DOCTRINE III. Though many hear, yet few believe or trust to the report of the gospel.

In discoursing this Doctrine, I shall,

I. Confirm this point, That though many hear, yet few believe or trust to the report of the gospel.

II. Give the reasons why so few believe the report of the gospel.

III. *Lastly*, Apply.

I. I shall confirm this point, That though many hear, yet few believe or trust to the report of the gospel. It is clear, if ye consider and view these two things.

1st, A view of the church in all ages, and the entertainment the gospel has met with among them to whom it came.

2dly, A view of the church setting aside those whom the scripture determines to be unbelievers.

First, Let us take a view of the church in all ages, and the entertainment the gospel has met with among those to whom it came. It has been a despised and disbelieved gospel generally in all ages, and under all dispensations. Few believed it,

1. Under the patriarchal dispensation, from Adam to Moses. It was first preached in paradise to Adam and Eve, being comprehended in the promise of Christ to come. By them indeed it was believed, and Adam preached it; but Cain slew Abel, and headed an apostasy. And in the days of Enos, the son of Seth, there was a professed distinction made between professors and others; Gen. iv, 26, "Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord." Noah, a preacher of righteousness, his doctrine was so little believed, that that generation was swept away with the flood. An unbelieving Ham was in the ark; and Nimrod shortly after headed a generation of unbelieving apostates, that built the tower of Babel. Abram was called alone from his country, where his father served other gods. And his posterity in Egypt had little knowledge of either law or gospel left them; Rom. v. 13, "For until the law sin was in the world."

2. Under the Mosaic dispensation, they had the gospel, though veiled with types and figures. But the body of the generation that came out of Egypt, believed not, but fell in the wildeanness; Heb. iv. 2. How often did the body of that nation fall off into idolatry? What heavy complaints did their prophets make time after time of the unbelief prevailing in their generations?

3. Under the Christian dispensation. The word out of Christ's own mouth was generally disbelieved; John xii. 37, 38, "But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him; that the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, "Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?" The gospel never had so great

success as in the apostles' days; yet even but few believed it in comparison of others in the world; Rom. x. 16, "But they have not all obeyed the gospel." The state of the church for the times thereafter may be seen, Rev. vi. in the first six seals. Then in the time of Antichrist, the world wondered after the beast, the witnesses were reduced to two; and the churches of believers driven to the wilderness. At the reformation the gospel had remarkable success; but yet believers were but few comparatively; and there have been but few all along since that time.

Secondly, Let us take a view of the church, setting aside those whom the scripture determines to be unbelievers; and we will soon see that but few do remain. Set aside,

1. The grossly ignorant of Christ, and of the truths of the gospel. These God himself casts out of the number; Isa. xxvii. 11, "It is a people of no understanding; therefore he that made them, will not have mercy on them; and he that formed them will shew them no favour." There may be a believing in an unseen, but not an unknown Christ. How can they believe the gospel, that know not what it is?

2. The profane, who are Christians in name, because they live in a Christian country; but have not a shape of a Christianity about them. Surely these do not believe the gospel; Tit. i. 16, "They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate." Sanctification and belief of the truth go together, 2 Thess. ii. 13. The gospel is the great mean of God's appointment for reforming the world; if then it prevail not to the reforming of men's lives, it is an evidence they believe it not, Heb. iv. 2.

3. The carnal and worldly, who make the world their chief good, mainly seeking that, and favouring it only. These undoubtedly are unbelievers; Phil. iii. 19, 20, "Whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly; and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things." No sooner doth a man believe the report of the gospel anent the unseen world, but the present evil world sinks in its value with him, Matth. xiii. 44, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field." But to the most part the matters of faith are as the bird in the bush; what they see with their eyes is the bird in hand; Psalm iv. 6, "There be many that say, Who will shew us any good?"

4. Mere moralists, all whose religion is confined to some pieces of the second table. These are they who are just in their dealings with

men, but know nothing of dealing with God through Christ, and make no conscience of the duties of worshipping God. They come but the one half of that Pharisee's length, mentioned Luke xviii; and to be sure are unbelievers, for Christ sets them aside; Matth. v. 20, "For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

5. Gross hypocrites, who have a profession of religion, and worship God, but in the meantime are loose and licentious in their walk. These are they who on their knees are like saints, but have no more religion than what lies in these external duties of worship. Them Christ sets aside as unbelievers; Matth. vii. 21, "Not every one that saith unto me, 'Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven;' and will disown any saving relation to them; Luke vi. 46, "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" That gospel that cleanses not a man's hands from unjust dealing; his mouth from lying, swearing, and filthy speaking; and his conversation from the pollutions of the world is certainly not believed.

6. Close hypocrites, whose outward conversation is blameless in the eye of the world, but in the meantime are inwardly strangers to God and Christ. Such were those in the church of Sardis, of whom our Lord says, Rev. iii. 1, "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." They are not unacquainted with the practice of outward duties both towards God and man; but they are absolute strangers to the life of faith, communion with God, and experimental religion. They are walking on in the dark, and dreaming they are in the way; yet have never one foot on it. These are unbelievers, for faith purifies the heart; Acts xv. 9. They are self-justiciaries, like the Jews of old, "who being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, did not submit themselves unto the righteousness of God;" Rom. x. 3.

7. *Lastly*, All unregenerate persons; for they are certainly unbelievers, as believers are regenerate; as clear from John i. 12, 13, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name; which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." And such are all those who have never been convinced of their sin and misery; nor humbled, and brought to be content with a Saviour on any terms; who have never had Christ revealed in them; nor been savingly determined and enabled to embrace him.

Now they of these several sorts make the throng of the multitude of the hearers of the gospel. And it is but here and there one that is not of one or other of them. Set aside, then, all these, few remain, few believers, few who trust to the gospel-report.

II. I shall give the reasons why so few believe the report of the gospel.

1. There is a natural impotency in all; John vi. 44, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me, draw him." This is cured in few; to few is the "arm of the Lord revealed." Believing the report of the gospel, is not, as some think, an easy report of imagination. It is beyond the power of nature. Yea, every thing in nature is against it, and riseth up against it, till the Spirit of the Lord overcome them into belief of the report of the gospel.

2. The predominant power of lusts, to which the gospel is an enemy. There our Lord lodges it; John iii. 19, "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." The gospel is a light; but they love darkness better; and therefore they will not receive the light by the belief thereof. They are set upon present things, things of sense; and therefore esteem the things of faith but as idle tales; John v. 44.

3. There is a judicial blindness on many. Men have refused to believe the gospel, that they might get continued in the embraces of their lusts, therefore God hath given them over into the hand of Satan, who has blinded them so, as they cannot behold the light and glory of the gospel; 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

USE 1. Of information. Hence learn, that,

1st, There is great odds between hearing and doing; James i. 22. Many hear, but few obey; many are called, but few chosen. The gospel comes to the ears of many, who receive the sound with an air of reverence, but never receive it into their hearts by faith. Do not then lay stress on your attendance on ordinances, as if that would render you acceptable to God; Jer. vii. 4, "Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these." Such a conceit will be sadly exposed at the last day, as is clear from what our Lord says will be the language of some at his awful tribunal, "We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets." Unto all such he would say, "Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity;" Luke xiii. 26, 27.

2dly, This may remove the occasion of stumbling by these three things. Do not stumble at it, (1.) Because the gospel hath so few friends in an evil day. The scripture has told us before, that few believe it at any time. It is a greater wonder, that one adheres to

it over the belly of persecution, especially even to death, than that hundreds forsake it; considering how rare the faith of it is even in a time of peace. (2.) That the foundations of Christianity come at length to be attacked by men of corrupt minds. For what wonder is it, that, in a time of long peaceable enjoyment of the gospel, they that never truly believed it, come at length to question it, and in end downright to deny it? (3.) That the lives either of professors or ministers of the gospel are altogether unsuitable to it. For men may profess and preach the gospel too, that they never believed. Man's arm may fit men to possess and preach it; but it is the arm of the Lord only that can bring men to believe it.

OBJECT. But is not that ground to question it, that so few believe it? **ANSW.** That is no just prejudice against it. For, (1.) There are many natural truths, which yet are believed by very few. I suppose the thousandth, not to say the ten thousandth person in the world that sees the sun and moon, does not believe the sun to be bigger than a cart-wheel, or any star to be so big as the moon; and yet learned men demonstrate by reason, that the sun is bigger than the whole earth by far, and the moon less than any star. But the gospel is supernatural truth, which cannot be comprehended or received by mere reason; 1 Cor. ii. 14, "For the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Therefore there is no ground to question the gospel-report, because few believe it. (2.) The most part of men are wedded to their lusts and passions, which the gospel is set for the rooting out of; Tit. ii. 11, 12, "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men; teaching us, that denying ungodliness, and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world." It is the interest of their lusts that the gospel be not believed; and therefore the general unbelief of the gospel is no prejudice against it; because men generally have a strong bias against it, from the mighty power of their lusts; John iii. 19, forecited. But the belief of it is of equal latitude with a sincere desire of enjoying God, and being like him; which is man's chief happiness.

3dly, The common way of the world is not God's way; and they are rare persons that are right. This is evident from our Lord's exhortation, Matth. vii. 13, 14, "Enter in at the strait gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat; because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Many will be walled out of the visible church, and thrown away as

naught, till they be left but as one of a city, and two of a family, as the gleanings of the viintage, that are to be carried to Zion above.

They are men wondered at, Zech. iii. 8; therefore not ordinary; God's jewels; Mal. iii. 17; therefore not common stuff; Christ's little, little flock, Luke xii. 32, (Greek.)

4thly, Lastly, Surely many deceive themselves as to their faith of the gospel, thinking they believe the gospel while they really believe it not; Hos. viii. 2, 3, "Israel shall cry unto me, My God, we know thee. Israel hath cast off the thing that is good." The apostle observes; 2 Thess. iii. 2, that "all men have not faith;" and our Lord shows it to be very rare; Luke xviii. 8, "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" I suppose it will be found, that few believe this very truth we are insisting on. For as few as there are who believe the gospel, if the question were put to each of us, Do you believe the gospel? Do you believe it? I reckon few, if any, particularly of the unbelievers, but would say, They do. The reasons of the mistake are these:—

1. They were brought up in the profession of the gospel, and they never questioned their belief of it. Many among us have no more for their belief of the gospel, than Papiets in Italy have for their belief of Popery, and Pagans in America for their belief of Paganism. Their fathers, and mothers, and priests told them so; and so they have a human faith of Popery and Paganism, upon that human testimony. And so many a Scotsman has no more but a human faith of the gospel, which they have taken up on the word of their fathers, mothers, and ministers; and they never questioned it. But the divine faith of the gospel is another thing, and that they will find when they come to a pinch in that matter; Matth. xvi. 17, "And Jesus said unto him, Blessed art thou Simon Barjona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." 1 Thess. ii. 13, "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but (as it is in truth) the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe."

2. They never had much ado with their faith of the gospel. Such as it is, it has lien by them idle all their days; like a book by a scholar he never had occasion to consult; or a piece of money one never offered in payment to his neighbour. Their faith of the gospel was never tried with barefaced Satanical temptations, obstinately insisted in; nor with their afflictions; nor with sound and thorough convictions of their lost and miserable state; and all is good untried. But the trial would have discovered another thing, James i. 12, that is true faith of the gospel that will abide a trial, 1 Pet. i. 6. 7.

3. They satisfy themselves with a general historical faith of the gospel, knowing nothing of trusting to it for all Christ's salvation to themselves. And if that be the believing of the gospel report, the devils are as good believers as they, and better too; James ii. 19, for the devils believe and tremble. They know not what it is to be, at the instance of the law, set before the tribunal of God, in the court of conscience, and to have the law there pressing them particularly with its demands and curse; and for their own defence to be fain to plead there as for their life, the holiness of Christ's nature, the righteousness of his life, and satisfaction for sin, and that upon the credit of the gospel report.

But there are four things which may evince that most of the hearers of the gospel, whatever they think, do not believe the gospel, nor trust it as true, nor trust to it as good.

1. It does not purify their hearts and lives; Acts xv. 9. The belief of the truth is the means appointed of God for sanctification; 2 Thess. ii. 13, "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth." Eph. v. 25, 26, "Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water, by the word." And it is the word of the gospel that is so; John xv. 3, "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." The word of the gospel received into the heart by faith, is like a spring that works out the mud; 1 Thess. ii. 13, "The word of God effectually worketh in you that believe." It is like leaven that seeks through the whole mass. For the Spirit of sanctification is in it; John vi. 63, "It is the spirit that quickeneth." The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." So then whose heart and life soever is not purified by the gospel, they do not really believe it; Heb. iv. 2.

The profane man, he that is ungodly with respect to God, unrighteous with respect to men, not sober with respect to himself, does not believe the gospel; for it "teacheth us, that denying ungodliness, and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly, in this present world," Tit. ii. 11, 12; and is effectual in believers; 1 Thess. ii. 13, forecited. But such a one is master of it, it is not master of him. Rom. i. 18, "He holds the truth in unrighteousness." The man that is a slave to his passions, his pride, wrath, and revenge, believes not the gospel; Isaiah xi. 6. The man whose God is the world, the covetous, the unjust, the sensual, the vain, &c., believes not; Matth. xiii. 45, 46, forecited.

2. It does not make them fruitful to God, as it does in believers; Col. i. 5, 6. That faith is vain that is without works; James ii. 20.

The word of the gospel is a heavenly seed, which, received into the hearts by faith, never misseth to bring forth fruit. As it puts out the fruits of the flesh, it brings in the fruits of the Spirit. It makes the man to live to Christ, and live for him; Phil. i. 21; as the woman of Samaria did, who not only lived unto Christ herself, but induced others, by her example, to believe in him as their Saviour. See John, chap. iv.

The man that makes no conscience of serving his generation by doing good to others, that lays not out himself to be useful for God in his place and station, that thinks it enough that he does not ill to others, and hangs not out a flag of defiance against the honour of God, is as really an unbeliever of the gospel, as he that is noxious, in respect of God and man; for where is his fruit? Col. i. 6. See Matth. xii. 30, "He that is not with me, is against me; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad."

3. It is not their chief comfort, as it is to the saints; Psalm cxix. 49, 50, "Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope. This is my comfort in my affliction; for thy word hath quickened me." The scripture calls the believer's great hope, "the hope of the gospel;" Col. i. 23. And it has been proven to be so by their suffering for it even unto death; Mark viii. 35, "For whosoever will save his life, shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's the same shall save it." What bears up a man in his greatest straits, must needs be his greatest comfort. The gospel is that which bore up the hearts of believers, under their greatest hardships. Therefore it has been found, that brown bread and the gospel has been pleasant fare to many a believer. Take away the gospel, and take the sun out of the world. Whatever are their straits or their storms, the gospel is their plight-anchor.

But alas! there are few thus minded. Give them full pantries and a warm fire-side, they could be right cheery without the gospel. It is the corn and the cattle, good markets, &c., they know the comfort of these; but many that know that, know little of the comfort of the gospel. If they be lifted up at any time, it is not the gospel that does it, but some creature-comfort. If some affliction befall them, some creature-comfort removed; what helps them is not the comfort of the gospel, but some other creature-comfort put in its room, or hoped for.

If one had his stock in a ship at sea, whatever joys or sorrows that man met with in his means at home, they would not be his chief ones; the chief would be about the ship. The gospel is the ship the believer's stock is in; and whatever joys or sorrows he

meets with in the world, yet his chief ones are in the gospel; Hab. iii. 17, 18, "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." There is such a difference betwixt a believer and an unbeliever, as betwixt a laird and a tenant in a harvest flood sweeping away the corn. The corn being swept away, the tenant has nothing left. Micah said, when his gods were taken away, "What have I more?" The other comforts himself, Yet it has not swept away the land. So Job vi. 13, "Is not my help in me? and is wisdom driven quite from me?"

4. It is not their chief concern what come of it. Ofttimes they have no concern at all about it; they will profanely put that off to them that live by it. Be it so, then all that believe it live by it, and it will be their chief concern; Isaiah xxxviii. 16; John vi. 63. It is the word of life, and believing it is the way to live; Isaiah lv. 3, "Hear, and your soul shall live." They will be concerned for it as for their life; Deut. xxxii. 47, and take away their hope from that airth, they would reckon themselves most miserable; 1 Cor. xv. 19. Therefore they will strive for the faith of the gospel as their all.

But I fear many a hearer of the gospel would take it for no ill news, if any body could but make them sure of it, that the whole gospel is but a fable; a plain evidence that it is not the thing they mainly trust to, else they would be mainly concerned for it.

USE 2. Be stirred up then to a weighty concern to attain to the true faith of the report of the gospel; that ye may be of those who really trust it as true, and trust to it as good. These following things may be of use to put a peculiar edge on your spirits for this:—

1. That there are so few that really believe it in a saving manner. When Christ said, "One of you shall betray me," the disciples said, "Is it I?" And the consideration that so few believe the report of the gospel, should put every one to see himself, that he be not an unbeliever.

2. Your salvation or damnation turns on this point; Mark xvi. 16, "He that believeth, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned." Many will be affected with some gross sins of theirs against the law, who never see the venom of their unbelief of the gospel. But this is the sin that draws deepest; and therefore that is the sin which the Spirit is in a special manner to convince of; John xvi. 8, 9, "And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment; of sin because they be-

lieve not on me." And that is the great soul-ruining sin ; John iii. 19, " This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil."

3. Doing this ye do all ; Mark v. 36, " Be not afraid, only believe." This is the short way, and the only way to sanctification. It is the belief of the gospel that brings sinners to the obedience of the law ; for thereby the soul is united to Christ, the storehouse of grace, and of the Spirit of holiness ; Eph. iii. 17 ; John i. 16. Hence it purifies the heart ; Acts. xv. 9 ; and the heart being purified, the life will be so too. So the apostle runs up obedience to it ; 1 Tim. i. 5.

4. If ye do not this ye do nothing ; 1 John iii. 23, " This is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ." John vi. 29, " This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." All that ye do in the way of obedience without it, will be but as so many cyphers, that will amount to just nothing in the sight of a holy God ; Heb. xi. 6, " Without faith it is impossible to please God." Your prayers, tears, justice, sobriety, &c., all will be lost without faith. Whatever good works any does without faith, are but dead works ; they may have the shape of good works, but the soul and life is wanting. Here is the reason why endeavours of reformation with unbelievers do not succeed ; why, when the doctrine of the gospel is corrupted, and preachers, instead of preaching Christ, turn their sermons into harangues of moral virtue, they and their hearers lose both grace and virtue, and turn profane.

5. *Lastly*, If ye really believe the gospel, nothing can ruin you ; if ye do not, nothing can save you. Under the law, the Jews were a stubborn, disobedient generation, every now and then falling into idolatry, till the Babylonish captivity ; yet were they preserved, God minding to try them with the dispensation of the gospel. But when they rejected and disbelieved the gospel, though they had quite left their idolatry, they were destroyed.

So whatever is your guilt, if ye believe the gospel, it will be wiped out ; Acts xvi. 31, " Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved ;" if not, whatever good ye do, ye will perish ; John iii. 36, " He that believeth not the Son shall not see life ; but the wrath of God abideth on him." The gospel is the last method of Heaven for the salvation of sinners ; where the law failed, the gospel came to help out ; Rom. viii. 3. But if ye miss salvation in the way of the gospel, there is not another method to follow ; so it is the last ship bound for Immanuel's land, and therefore the only one.

I shall conclude with some directions how to believe the gospel.

1. Persuade yourselves, that the faith of the gospel is beyond the power of nature ; John vi. 44 ; that there is a necessity of a power from on high to bring you to believe. This will raze the old foundation, and cause you look up for it.

2. Urge on yourselves the faith of the law. It also is the testimony of God. Believe it with application to yourselves. See the authority of God in its commands binding on you ; the truth of God, in its threatening and curse, reaching you and holding you fast.

3. *Lastly*, With an eye to the Spirit's working in you, consider and apply the promise of the gospel ; for that is not only the object, but the means of faith ; Rom. x. 17, " Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

DOCTRINE IV. There is no true believing or trusting to the report of the gospel, but what is the effect of the working of a divine power on the soul for that end.

In prosecuting this doctrine, I shall,

I. Evince the truth of it.

II. Shew what is that working of divine power whereby the soul is brought to trust to the gospel-report.

III. *Lastly*, Apply.

I. I shall evince the truth of the doctrine. Consider for it,

1. Express scripture testimony ; John vi. 44, " No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me, draw him." The apostle calls it therefore " The faith of the operation of God," Col. ii. 12 ; and " the work of faith with power," 2 Thess. i. 11, is fulfilled. Hence believing is said to be given ; Phil. i. 29. Yea, no less power is put forth in it, than that which was exerted in the raising of Christ from the dead ; Eph. i. 19, 20.

2. The state that by nature we are in, " dead in sin ;" Eph. ii. 1. Faith is the first vital act of the soul, quickened by the Spirit of life from Jesus Christ ; which therefore a soul without the Spirit of life, is no more capable of, than a dead man of breathing, walking, &c. The raising of the dead is a work competent to God alone ; the raising of dead souls as well as bodies ; John v. 25, 26, " Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God ; and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself."

3. There can be no faith without knowledge ; and the knowledge of spiritual things man is by nature incapable of ; 1 Cor. ii. 14, " The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God ; for they are foolishness unto him ; neither can he know them, be-

cause they are spiritually discerned." How can one trust to the report of the gospel, without discerning the gospel in its glorious excellency? But the eye of man naturally is out as to these things. Natural truths he can discern by natural powers; but supernatural truths are above his reach without supernatural abilities.

4. Man is naturally under the power of Satan, a captive of the devil, who with his utmost efforts will hinder the work of faith; 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4, "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not." Such a case the gospel finds men in; Isa. lxi. 1; and it is the design of the gospel to bring them out of it; Acts xxvi. 17, 18. But how can such be the design of the gospel, but because it is the instrument of a superior power; Rom. i. 16, and is rendered effectual by the Omnipotent himself? 2 Cor. x. 4, 5. The strong man must be cast out by a stronger.

5. Man's trust is by nature firmly pre-occupied by those things which the gospel calls them to renounce. He is wedded to other confidences naturally, which therefore he will hold by, till a power above nature carry him off from them. And therefore it is a differing character between the Lord's people and all others, that they have "no confidence in the flesh;" Phil. iii. 3.

(1.) Self-confidence is natural to man. And therefore it is the first lesson at Christ's school, to deny ourselves; which is inwarped in the very nature of faith, or trusting to the gospel; Matth. xvi. 24. Man going away from God as his chief end, set up himself for his chief end; and so it is as natural for him to act from and for himself, as for birds to fly in the air. So that to unself a man, which is done in the work of faith, must needs be a work of divine power.

(2.) Creature-confidence. Man not being self-sufficient, must needs seek something without himself wherein to rest his heart. Being estranged from God, he goes to the creature; Jer. ii. 13. And to it he is so wedded in confidence, that, after a thousand disappointments, he still maintains it. And the truth is, it is impossible to get the heart carried off it, except to absolute despair, without putting a better in the room thereof; which is done only by faith taking a God in Christ instead thereof; Matth. xiii. 45, 46. This surely requires a supernatural power; Jer. xvi. 19.

(3.) Law-confidence. The law was Adam's covenant; and as he was to work and win his wages, so that is the natural religion of all his posterity. Nature knows no other way of acceptance with God; and men stick by it till death, and a violent death too, do part them; Gal. ii. 19, "For I through the law am dead to the law,

that I might live unto God." Rom. vii. 4, "Wherefore my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ." An evidence that it is another power than their own must bring them off it.

6. Man has a strong bias and bent against believing or trusting to the gospel; Rom. x. 3, "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." John v. 40, "And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life." The contrivance of the gospel lies cross to the mind and will of natural men, and they to it; so that the one is the very reverse of the other. Hence the Jews and Greeks both were opposite to the gospel, and in their wisdom reckoned it folly. So that the soul must be new moulded by a divine power, ere it can receive it; 1 Cor. ii. 14, forecited.

7. *Lastly*, It is the product of the Holy Spirit, wherever it is; Gal. v. 22, "But the fruit of the Spirit is faith." Hence Christ is called "the author of it," Heb. xii. 2, as working it in the elect by his own Spirit; 2 Cor. iv. 13. It was promised in the covenant for the elect, to be effected by the Spirit; and so it is peculiar to them; Acts xiii. 48, as being the work of God's Spirit only. And the gospel is the only immediate outward mean of it, because it only is "the ministration of the Spirit."

II. What is that working of divine power whereby the soul is brought to trust to the gospel-report? There is a twofold work of divine power on the soul for that end.

First, A mediate work, which is preparatory to it; whereof the Spirit is the author, and the instrument is the law. It is twofold.

1st, An awakening work; whereby the secure sinner is roused up, and made to lay salvation to heart, which he was little concerned about before, sleeping securely. And that is done by the Spirit's bringing home the law on the sinner's conscience. And,

1. There is a divine power bringing home on the sinner's conscience the commands of the law; Rom. vii. 9, "For I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." And thereby they are discovered; 1. In their divine authority, as the commands of the eternal sovereign God, which clothes them with an awfulness they were not wont to appear in to the sinner; each of them being prefaced with a "Thus saith the Lord." 2. As binding on the sinner in particular; so that the bond of the command is found by him girding him strait, however he felt little of it before; Rom. vii. 10, "And the commandment which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death." It is observable that the

ten commands are all in the second person, speaking to every man as if they concerned no other but him, "Thou shalt not," &c. And when the Spirit comes, he speaks them the same way to the sinner's conscience; Rom. vii. 7, "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law; for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet."

Now hereby the sinner is convinced of sin, and brought in guilty before the Lord, John xvi. 8; Rom. iii. 19. His sins original and actual, of heart and life, of thoughts, words, and actions, are set before him, Psalm l. 21. And he is like a thief found, Jer. ii. 26.

2. This divine power brings home on the sinner's conscience the curse of the law; John xvi. 8, "And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." And it is discovered to be, 1. God's curse, heavier than mountains of lead, which, in virtue of his greatness, is insupportable, in virtue of his infiniteness eternal, and in virtue of his truth infallible; though before it was but like the sounding again of the mountains in his conceit. 2. God's curse on him in particular, staking him down to revenging wrath. The Spirit of the Lord says within the man, as Mal. iii. 9, "Ye are cursed with a curse; for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation." As long as the sinner can ward off the particular application of the curse to himself, he will little value the gospel, Rev. iii. 17. But the word delivers it in the general; Gal. iii. 10, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them;" and a divine power obliges the conscience to apply.

Hereby the sinner is convinced of his misery, and sees himself lost and undone, Luke xv. 17. And so he is,

1. Stung to the heart, and galled with remorse, Acts ii. 37. Waves of killing grief go over his soul; he sees he has been murdering his own soul, and he groans out an elegy over his dead self; Rom. vii. 9, "I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died."

2. Frightened with terror, Acts xvi. 29; with the terror of God, the terror of death, and the terror of eternity.

3. Racked with anxiety, Acts ii. 37. Sometimes he hopes, sometimes he fears, but is always anxious. This anxiety fills head, heart, and hands; swallows up all other cares, for the man sees how true it is; Matth. xvi. 26, "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

2dly, An humbling work, whereby the proud sinner is brought low to the dust; not only finding a need of salvation, but an abso-

lute need of Christ for salvation ; that there is no other way of help for him ; but if he get not Christ he must perish. So he is broken off from,

1. Self-confidence, Luke xv. 17. He sees he has destroyed himself, but cannot help himself, Hos. xiii. 9. He finds that he is without strength, light, or life ; that his work is quite beyond his reach, the debt beyond his ability to pay ; the bonds of sin, in the guilt of it, and the power of it, quite above his might to break asunder, Rom. vii. 9.

2. Creature-confidence, Luke xv. 16. While his conscience was asleep, he pleased himself in his enjoyment of the creature, but now that it is awake, the emptiness of the whole creation is felt by him. His lawful comforts are foysonless, while he thinks God is his enemy ; his unlawful comforts have left a sting behind them, which the whole creation cannot pull out. There is no rest for his heart now, but in a God in Christ.

3. Law-confidence, Rom. vii. 9, 10. Time was when he had hopes of acceptance with God by the deeds of the law, and set down his duties of first and second table as so much clear gain ; but now he sees they are all but loss, Phil. iii. 6, 7. So he despairs of mending his case that way ; and that he cannot pay his own debt in whole or in part. And all this is by means of the law too, discovered in its spirituality and severity ; Gal. ii. 19, " I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God."

Secondly, This work of divine power is an immediate work ; whereby faith is produced in the soul, it caused to trust to the gospel-report ; whereof the Spirit is the author, and the gospel the instrument. And it is,

1. A quickening work ; whereby the dead soul is called again to spiritual life ; Eph. ii. 1, " You hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins." Therefore the same power is said to be exerted in that case, as in raising Christ from the dead, re-uniting his soul with his body, Eph. i. 19, 20. So the Spirit of Christ enters into the dead soul, and the dry bones live, Ezek. xxxvi. 27 ; which Spirit is communicated in the word of the gospel, as the vehicle thereof, so to speak, Gal. iii. 2. Hence the word of the gospel is said to be spirit and life, John vi. 63 ; as being the ministration of the Spirit. An emblem of which is in the resurrection of the dry bones. And hence there is,

1. A power to believe, as in a living man to breathe. So the Spirit of life being the Spirit of faith in the soul, it has a supernatural power, for that supernatural act, 2 Cor. iv. 13. In vain do we call the lame man to walk, who has no ability of walking ; but the Spi-

rit with the call of the gospel entering into the sinner, he is enabled to embrace Christ on the gospel-report.

2. A disposition to believe; Psalm cx. 3, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power;" as in Lazarus brought to life, to come out of the grave, and to lie no longer there. So the soul becomes pliable to the gospel-call, content to come to Christ, content to be made clean. Death's bands being loosed, the neck is no more as an iron sinew; but the life given disposes to what is agreeable to it.

2. An illuminating work. There is a knowledge in faith, which is therefore called knowledge, Isa. liii. 11; John xvii. 3. No man will trust to the report of the gospel until he know it, and know it by a supernatural discovery too, 1 Cor. ii. 14. And the Spirit of the Lord makes that discovery, Acts xxvi. 18; shewing the treasure hid in the gospel-field, Matth. xiii. 44. This the Spirit doth by bringing home the gospel-report to the soul; in which he demonstrates it to the soul with the greatest certainty, 1 Cor. ii. 4. He demonstrates it to be,

1. God's own word, 1 Thess. ii. 13. The report comes in the word that Christ is sent in the character of Saviour of the world; that he is able to save, and willing to save the worst of sinners; and that "whosoever believeth in him, shall not perish, but have everlasting life," John iii. 16. The Spirit of the Lord sets this in such a clear light, as that the sinner sees it is not a report of fallible men; but the word of the eternal God that cannot lie; the divine testimony, which is so certain that it cannot be false, 1 Cor. ii. 4.

(2.) God's word to that soul in particular, as really as if a voice from heaven did speak to him by name, saying, Such an one, Christ is your Saviour, able and willing to save you; and you trusting on him "shall not perish, but have everlasting life," 1 Thess. i. 5. This is as it were an internal word, applying to the soul in particular, the external word which is general; and without it the special application of faith will not be. Hence the Spirit is said to convince of righteousness as well as of sin; which he does by a particular application of the law in the one, and of the gospel in the other; John xvi. 8. And the Spirit's testimony of Christ is distinguished from the preacher's testimony; John xv. 26, 27, "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me. And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning."

(3.) A determining work, effectually and irresistibly determining them to believe, so that they can no longer not believe. This is

called the Father's drawing, viz., by his Spirit; John vi. 44. The Spirit of the Lord freely wins the soul, over the belly of all opposition.

(1.) To believe, and trust the report of the gospel, as true. For the demonstration of the Spirit is accompanied with power; 1 Cor. ii. 4. Some things are so clear to all, as that two and three make five, so that none can but believe it. Some things are so demonstrated by sight, or by reason, that though one could not believe them before, they can as little not believe them, or withhold their assent from them, after. So the gospel being demonstrated by the Spirit, cannot but be believed, and trusted as true; and therefore it is said to have come in much assurance; 1 Thess. i. 5, as a thing seen by the soul, or demonstrated to it.

And so faith is the soul's echo to this demonstration of the Spirit; the soul saying he is the Saviour of the world, and my Saviour, able and willing to save sinners, and to save me; on whom I trusting shall not perish, like Thomas, "My Lord, and my God," John xx. 28.

(2.) To trust to the report of the gospel, as good. For the same demonstration of the Spirit so discovers the excellency, and absolute suitableness of Christ to the sinner's case, and full security for its salvation that is in him, upon the infallible truth of the gospel-report that it being earnestly desirous of salvation, cannot but trust to it as good for them, and good security.

So then here faith takes up the soul's eternal rest, resting wholly on Christ held forth in the gospel for salvation, upon the security of the word of the gospel.

USE I. Of information. Hence learn, that,

1. The faith of the gospel is to be suspected, that springs up without a work of mighty power to the producing of it. These are not of that sort; Eph. i. 19, 20, who have experienced "the exceeding greatness of his power toward them in believing, according to the working of his mighty power; which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead." Wild oats spring up without any pains about them; but it is not so with good grain. So a false faith may spring from nature, without divine influence; but true faith is the fruit of the mighty power of God. It is the loss of many, that they come easily by their religion, they know not how, but as in a morning-dream, it costs them nothing.

It is true, grace is a seed that springs and grows up a man knows not how; Mark iv. 17. But it is one thing to spring up without tilling and sowing; another, to spring up out of ground tilled and sown, one knows not how. The husbandman knows very well how he comes

by his crop, what pains he was at in labouring the ground, though he cannot account for that how the seed he sowed did turn into such a fair braird. So faith springing up in the heart may be mysterious to the believer, as to the time and way of it; who yet knows there was an awakening, humbling, enlightening, and powerfully determining work on him for that end.

Some indeed may be sanctified from the womb; but that will appear in grace's exercise beginning with the exercise of reason; and Satan will readily assault their faith after, that they shall find a difficulty in the exercise of it.

2. See whence it is that most men's faith of the gospel has no sanctifying effect on their lives. It is a mere natural faith, and therefore cannot change their natures. If their faith were the produce of a mighty work of divine power on their souls, whereby they were quickened, humbled, enlightened, and powerfully determined, it would make a suitable change on the whole man. It would be a most holy faith; Jude verse 20, as making holy; produced by the holy Spirit; and uniting the soul to the holy Jesus, and drawing sanctifying virtue from him.

3. The salvation of sinners is altogether of free grace. Man can do nothing to purpose for himself any manner of way. In the law-way, perfect obedience is required; that is certainly beyond his reach. In the gospel-way faith is required; and that is beyond his power too; Eph. ii. 8, "By grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God." The gospel casts out a rope to hale sinners to land; but the sinner has no hands to lay hold on it; his very faith must be wrought in him by the Spirit.

4. Believers have reason to be humble, and to acknowledge that whatever difference in the matter of faith and holiness is betwixt them and others, it is purely owing to the work of the Spirit, not to themselves, agreeable to what the apostle saith; 1 Cor. iv. 7, "Who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now, if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" Sinners are all naturally dead in sin; and free grace sends the quickening Spirit to one, not to another; that "he that glories, may glory in the Lord."

5. The difficulty that some find in believing, is rather a good sign, than an ill one. They were the disciples that said; Luke xvii. 5, "Increase our faith." The soul that finds a difficulty in believing the gospel, and is loaded with that slowness to believe, and looking out to the Spirit of the Lord to help him to believe, is in a hopeful case as to the work of faith; Mark ix. 24. The Lord makes the truth of faith, and his own power in working it, to appear the

better, by letting men feel the power of their unbelieving hearts.

USE 2. Of Exhortation. Let us look to the Lord for the operation of his mighty power, to cause us to believe. There is need of this, (1.) For the begetting of true faith in us. Natural powers assisted with the best means of external revelation, will not do it. (2.) For the increasing and exercise of faith. New supplies are necessary for this. And with respect to both, both ministers and people have need to look to the Spirit of God. As the ship will make but sorry progress, if the wind blow not; so the gospel will be but ill improv'd, if the Spirit of the Lord do not blow.

DOCTRINE. The feeling of this power of God is oftentimes very rare among the hearers of the gospel.

We need not insist on the proof of this; our own case is a visible evidence of it. With respect to which we may consider, 1. What are the causes of it; and, 2. Our duty.

I. What are the causes of it? Why is it so with us?

1. An old standing quarrel that God has with our mother. The sins of Manasseh were a standing quarrel in the days of his grandson Josiah; 2 Kings xxiii. 26, and his great-grandson Jehoiakim, chap. xxiv. 3. God is saying concerning us, as Hos. ii. 4, 5, "And I will not have mercy upon her children; for they be the children of whoredoms. For their mother hath played the harlot; she that conceived them hath done shamefully; for she said, I will go after my lovers, that give me my bread and my water," &c. Do we ask, Why the Lord has so much withdrawn himself in our land? Ah! what wonder is it, his soul so much abhors a land, wherein a covenant sworn to him with uplifted hands, was broken purposely, burnt disgracefully, his ordinances changed, his saints persecuted and murdered, and his name insulted and blasphemed; and these things never yet sufficiently mourned for; I doubt much if ever Scotland shall recover her ancient spiritual glory, through the presence of the Lord remarkably and gloriously with her, till she go back to God in the manner she came away.

2. A present course of backsliding among all ranks in church and state. In reforming times the Spirit of the Lord returns to a land; Psalm cii. 16, 17, "When the Lord shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory. He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer." And so it was seen among our forefathers oftener than once. Our present case in respect of the Lord's withdrawing, doth therefore write us a backsliding generation; whose judgment and sin, see Isa. lvii. 17, "For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him; I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart." The generation

is souring apace; the elder sort losing the life of religion that some-time-a-day they had; and the younger neither knowing any thing about it, nor caring for it. A sad evidence of the Spirit's being in great measure gone.

3. Worldliness prevailing through long peace. Times of persecution were times of much of God's presence; enemies kept professors stirring. And the more they afflicted them, the more they grew; the young folk were engaged to embrace a persecuted religion. But now the generation is sunk in worldly cares and ease; and religion is so cheap, that it is quite undervalued. It is as Josh. xxiv. 31, "Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua, and which had known all the works of the Lord, that he had done for Israel;" implying, that after the elders were gone too, the generation went away from God, for good and all. Truly, we may say in our case, Our Joshuas are away long ago; and our elders that have outlived them, are by this time nearly gone. So the Lord, and his great works he did in the land, are almost worn out of ken, and out of mind, with this generation; and the generation that knew not Joseph and his afflictions, are filling the stage fast, and proclaiming themselves unconcerned in them; trampling on that religion that others suffered for. But let them take heed that sadder sufferings be not abiding them, that they will neither get shifted, nor be so well buckled for. See Judges iii. 1, "Now these are the nations which the Lord left, to prove Israel by them, even as many of Israel as had not known all the wars of Canaan."

4. Grieving and quenching the Spirit; Isa. lxiii. 10. The Spirit is compared to a fire; and when that holy fire is cherished and nourished, a small spark may become a great flame; but being neglected, and sought to be extinguished, it abates. Many have been the methods taken publicly and privately to quench the Spirit in the generation; and they have prevailed far, till that which remains is even ready to die. God who by his own hand has given several sharp knocks at the door of some sinners' hearts, who yet would not open, has therefore been provoked to go and leave them.

II. What is our duty in such a case?

1. Mourn over it; lament the Lord's withdrawals as those who are sensible of the great loss; 1 Sam. vii. 2.

2. Pray much and earnestly for the return of his powerful presence to ordinances; Cant. iii. 1—4; Isa. lxiv. 7.

3. *Lastly*, Consider the word of the gospel as the word of the eternal God; 1 Thess. ii. 13, and labour to walk up to what ye know of the word; John vii. 17. If ye do so, ye shall feel, that his "words do good to him that walketh uprightly;" Micah ii. 7.