

those things were so, Acts xvii. 11. I offer the following motives to press this exhortation.

1. Consider the way how the word came to the world. It was by the Mediator, John i. 18. When Adam fell, death stared him in the face; and he ran away from God, till the word of reconciliation came forth, Gen. iii. 15; which disappointed the expectation of devils, surprised angels, and revived the self-murdering creature.

2. Consider, it is the word of life, Deut. xxxii. 46, 47. Nothing concerns us so nearly as this. If ye do not prize the word, and hear what is commanded us of God, there can be no comfort on a death-bed. It will make us table complaints against you before the Lord; and we will have a sad meeting at the great day. But if ye will hear, ye will be our joy and crown; your souls shall be saved in the day of the Lord, and we will bless the day that ever we met. Come to ordinances with a keen appetite after the bread of life; and pray for us, that the Lord may deal kindly with us, and furnish us with proper nourishment for your souls.

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#### A CAVEAT AGAINST RECEIVING THE GOSPEL IN VAIN.

2 COR. vi. 1.—*We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also, that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.*

I HAVE been calling you to a diligent attendance upon the ordinances, and now I come to beseech you not to receive the grace of God in vain: for if you should attend the means of grace ever so carefully, yet if you receive the grace of God in vain, all your labour is lost, and ye must perish in your sins at last.

The words I have read are a pathetic exhortation, in which,

1. The party exhorting is the apostle, in his own name, and that of all faithful ministers, who are called *workers together with God*. Compare 1 Cor. iii. 9. In the purchase of salvation Christ had none with him; but in the application of it he makes use of gospel-ministers, working with him, as instrumental causes, in exhorting, &c. and bringing the word to the ears of people.

2. The manner of the exhortation, *beseeching*; which denotes mildness and gentleness in dealing with souls, and withal earnestness and fervency of address.

3. The matter of it. *The grace of God* here denotes the gospel, as it is expressly called, Tit. ii. 11. It is so denominated, (1.) In respect of its rise, which was mere grace. (2.) Of its subject, being

the doctrine of grace, offering the free favour of God to sinners in Christ. (3.) In respect of its end, which is grace. (4.) Of its revelation to particular places. To *receive it in vain*, is to have the gospel among them, but not to be the better of it to salvation, as the seed is in vain received by the ground, which grows not up, but is lost. The doctrine is,

Doct. 'That people to whom the gospel is sent, had need to take heed that they receive it not in vain.'

In discoursing from this doctrine, I shall shew,

I. How the gospel may be received in vain.

II. Make improvement.

I. I am to shew, how the gospel may be received in vain. And here it will be necessary to shew,

1. In what respects the gospel cannot be in vain.

2. In what respects it may be received in vain.

*First*, I am to shew, in what respects the gospel cannot be in vain. And it cannot be in vain,

1. In respect of God; he cannot fall short of what he purposeth to bring to pass by it, Isa. xlvi. 10. 'My counsel shall stand, (says he), and I will do all my pleasure.' That looking for fruit, mentioned, Isa. v. 4; is ascribed to God after the manner of men; but an omniscient omnipotent Being cannot properly be disappointed, Isa. lv. 10, 11. 'For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it to bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.'

(1.) All his elect will be brought in by it. Hence, when the apostles Barnabas and Paul preached at Antioch in Pisidia, and met with much opposition, it is observed, however, that 'as many as were ordained to eternal life, believed,' Acts xiii. 48. The sound of the gospel-trumpet will gather the elect, however vain the sound be to others; for Christ's people shall be made willing in the day of his power, Psal. cx. 3. Though the rain fall in vain on the rocks, yet it does not so on the good ground. And that glorious instrument will be honourably laid by at the great day, having done its work.

(2.) His mercy and justice will be cleared by it, so as that gospel-despisers shall appear most justly condemned, Acts xiii. 46; while men have rejected the counsel of God against themselves. The offer of reconciliation will justify God's procedure abundantly against gospel-despisers.

2. It cannot be in vain, in respect of faithful ministers, who, according to the grace given them, pursue the great end of their office, viz. their acting as ambassadors for God, and praying sinners in Christ's stead, to be reconciled unto God, 2 Cor. v. 20.

(1.) In respect of their acceptance with God. Though their labours do no good, God will accept of their sincere endeavours to serve him in his work, Gal. iv. 11; compare 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16. Preaching the gospel faithfully, and warning every man, is our duty; converting souls is God's work. If ministers faithfully discharge their duty, and yet success answer not, God will accept their work, Ezek. xxxiii. 8, 9. Isa. vi.

(2.) In respect of their reward of grace. Some ministers God sets to tread out the corn, while they freely eat of their labours, and have the satisfaction to see the pleasure of the Lord prospering in their Master's hand. The mouths of others are muzzled; and they have nothing but weary work, like that of the disciples, when they said to their Lord, 'We have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing,' Luke v. 5. But it shall not be in vain: God does not proportion his faithful servants' reward to their success, but to their pains and faithfulness. For as it was with the Master, so it is with the servants, Isa. xlix. 4. 'I have laboured in vain, (says he), I have spent my strength for nought; yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God.'

3. It cannot be altogether in vain in respect of honest-hearted hearers, Micah ii. 7. 'Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?' When the word falls on good ground, it will bring forth fruit, though not always alike. It is hard to say, that ever God sends his gospel to any place, but there are some to be bettered by it, even then when he is taking his farewell of a people, as in the case of the Jews. There were seven thousand in Israel that had not bowed the knee to Baal in the time of Elijah, even when that prophet thought there had not been one.

4. It cannot be utterly in vain as to any that hear it, Is. lv. 11. forecited. It will have some effect following it. Even those who most of all receive it in vain as to good success, yet it is not in vain.

(1.) As to a testimony for God against them, to be produced at the last day, Rev. iii. 20. 'Behold I stand at the door and knock. If any man will hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.' Behold angels and men, be ye witnesses, that here is an offer of me to sinners. Though they should refuse to hear the message with their bodily ears, yet if it come where they are, it will be a witness against them, Matth. x. 14, 15. The dust of their feet will witness they were there with

Christ's message, and that salvation was in their offer. The servants of Christ must set up the standard, whether any will gather to it or not, Ezek. ii. 7. See ver. 5.

(2.) As to the manifestation of unsoundness, Eph. v. 13. As the light of the sun will discover things in their own colours, though we wink never so hard; so the gospel will hang the sign of folly at every man's door out of Christ. The gospel was in vain to none more than the greatest pretenders to religion in Christ's time; but see the effect of it, Mal. iii. 2. 'But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like the refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap.' Matth. iii. 12. 'His fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into his garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.' The wind will discover chaff by corn, though impotency must be at the work to change it into good grain. Hence the gospel oft-times draws the pillow from under people's heads, that never thoroughly awaken, tormenting them that dwell on the earth. Hence we read of some that 'say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits; get out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the holy One of Israel to cease from before us,' Isa. xxx. 10, 11. There is much noise at this day about faithful preaching; and I do not doubt unfaithful preachers are wanting; but I greatly doubt if Christ's thoughts and men's thoughts will agree about what it is. Concerning this I would ask you,

*Quest. 1.* Whether that preaching which crosses the heart-corruptions of the hearers, even the best of them, or that which is suited and most agreeable to the humours of the hearers, and tickles them most, is the most faithful preaching? See Gal. i. 10; 'Do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.' Where I shall only observe, that Paul makes no difference of men, professors or others.

2. Whether can a soul, ignorant of Christ and its own natural state, a profane man and a formal hypocrite, sit softest under that preaching, whose main scope is to level at people's particular case, on which the balance will turn at the great day, or that which lies further off from the vitals of practical godliness, and rubs on none so little as the hearers? 2 Tim. ii. 15.

3. Whether the great stress of faithful preaching lies in insisting chiefly on such sins of the time as may be reformed, and yet we go to hell at the hinder end, or on those things that have been, are, and will be, the bloody sins of all times, which if they could be got

reformed, Christ would get heart-friends, and we should certainly see his face for ever in heaven ?

4. *ult.* Whether is it the most faithful preaching that fills the hearers with convictions of guilt, self-loathing, and deep humiliation before the Lord, or that which sends them away commending the preacher, and puffed up with self-conceit? If faithful preaching were weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, the hearts of most hearers would say, that they have more of it than they can bear. I do profess, I have had less difficulty to preach things relating to the public, when I knew those were hearing me whose hearts would have been galled with it, than amongst you, where there appears more zeal for these things than for true holiness of heart and life, lest my deceitful heart should be led aside to preach to please men. And not without grief of heart have I often seen the snare, when, upon my beginning to speak of such things, an unusual attention and liveliness has suddenly run through among us, which has presently died out with that particular, and become as flat and dead as before at the most weighty points of practical godliness. But I must discharge my conscience according to my small measure, both as to the case of the public and private, whatsoever use men make of it.

(3.) As to execution on souls, if not on lusts. Christ's sword is two-edged, and with one of the two it will wound, Psal. xlv. 5; if it miss a man's lusts, it will not miss his soul, Hos. vi. 5; 'If it open not the blind eye, it will put it out: if it soften not the hard heart, it will make it harder, Isa. vi. 10. The gospel never left a nation, parish, or person, as it found them, but either better or worse. 'If I had not come,' says Christ, 'and spoken to them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin,' John xv. 22. The ministers of the gospel in its most unsuccessful times, drive not an empty chariot; Christ is in it, and his arrows are flying about him, either to kill or make alive.

(4.) *Lastly,* As to the aggravation of men's condemnation, Matth. xi. 22, 24. The more the light of the gospel is despised on earth, the more violent is the flame in hell. Where the ladder to heaven is set up and not used, there will be more deep sinking into the pit. There is no sin like the despising of the remedy of sin. Refused grace will burn like coals of juniper, Heb. x. 29.

*Secondly,* I come to shew, in what respects the gospel may be received in vain. A thing is received in vain when it falls short of its native effects and ends, as physic does when it purgeth not, Gal. iv. 11. Now, in the general, the gospel is received in vain,

1. When it profits not men to salvation, which is the great end of the contrivance of the gospel, Phil. ii. 16. When men die eternally

with the meat of their souls in their mouths, and starve while the manna rains about their tent-doors; while the soul remains and dies in the prison, though Christ comes and proclaims liberty to it; thus it is often received in vain, Luke xiv.

2. When the fruits of it are not brought forth in people's lives, Matth. iii. 8. When the gospel has its native effect on men, it changes their hearts and lives. It is the rain of heaven that will have meet fruits following it, if it be not received in vain. The fruits of the gospel are two, faith and holiness.

(1.) Faith, Rom. x. 17; 'Faith cometh<sup>r</sup> by hearing.' The gospel is that which holds forth the mean of the soul's reunion with God by faith in Christ, the only way to bring sinners back to God again. Now, when this is not effected, the gospel is received in vain. Hence the prophet complains, Isa. liii. 1; 'Who hath believed our report?'

(2.) Holiness, Tit. ii. 11. When this seed of the word is sown in the heart, it will sanctify it, John xv. 3; Eph. v. 26. It is that word by which the elect are created in Christ Jesus unto good works, having a converting and sanctifying power when impregnated by the Spirit. Now, according as these things fail, the gospel is received in vain. More particularly, the gospel is received in vain,

1. When the doctrine of it is corrupted, Gal. iv. 11; as in vain does that stomach receive meat, that corrupts it instead of digesting it. And thus is the gospel entertained in the land at this day, while error and delusions abound, and the Confession of Faith, that excellent standard of pure doctrine, is attacked and vilified on every hand; and more particularly when the doctrine of grace is corrupted, against which almost all sects do bend their force, and in opposition to which they do usually meet. Two things here deserve tears of blood.

(1.) Much legal preaching, where duty is indeed pressed, and sin reproved, but the evangelic nature of duties is little cleared up, and men are driven into themselves to spin their own ruin out of their own bowels, and Christ and his grace are not preached, because not understood. And, which is most lamentable, there is little sense among professors to discern this legal strain that reigns in the sermons of many, *bona vox et bona verba*.

(2.) Much legal practice among professors. Their duties, like Dagon's, are set in the room of Christ. There is little experience of turning out of ourselves, but a constant turning in to ourselves for what we do. And no small weight is laid on duties, nay, upon a very opinion in the matter of God's favour. The reason is, they have never had the work of humiliation deep enough on their spirits.

2. When the simplicity of gospel-worship is forsaken, and is adulterated with men's inventions, Matth. xv. 2. 2 Cor. xi. 3. And even thus the idolatry of the mass, and the superstitious service of the church of England, have dared to set up their face, with the countenance of not a few, in a land of light. England once had the simplicity of gospel-worship established among them. Had it not been so far received in vain, they had not sit down again on their old dregs; and had our rulers had a due regard to the simplicity of the gospel, they had not in their union with them, consented to their fixing themselves on these dregs of theirs, contrary to moral duty forbidding to consent to sin, and to the supperadded obligation of the covenant. And it may be, were the temptation laid to our doors, it would appear that we have received the gospel in vain too. For when once people decline from God's institutions, and obtrude their fancies for Bible duties, it is hard to say how far they may go. But beware of this. Let us be spiritual in our walk with God; it is the best preservative that I know against it.

3. When they are ashamed to appear for it, and have not a brow to keep and hold fast what the Lord has given. In vain is it received, that people have no confidence to hold fast when they have it, Rev. iii. 11. How many are ashamed of gospel truths and ways! they will be gibed out of them. We must contend for the faith; and this is a day wherein the Lord seems to be calling this church to contend for those privileges which he has given her, and none have power to take from her, particularly that of appointing fasts and thanksgivings; though we should manage our contendings in such a way as becomes the matters of the God of order. Prayers, tears, and the word of their testimony, are the most proper arms of the church.

4. When the gospel cannot look gross immoralities out of countenance among people. Surely in vain is it there received where the devil reigns at ease notwithstanding, Luke xix. 8, 9. Truly much in vain is the gospel received among us this way. Ah! Sirs, is it not so when profane swearing is so frequent, Sabbath-breaking, contempt of gospel ordinances, uncleanness, every one devouring another, lying, cheating, abound, and common honesty is rare to be found? &c. Truly it is a sign that there is little power with ministers' preaching, and little room it gets in people's hearts.

5. When it leaves professors upon their dregs of formality, as well as the profane in their profanity. It is but cold entertainment the gospel gets when it gets room once or twice a-day in people's houses, but has no access to their hearts, to raise up there the power of godliness; truly it will never set them the length of heaven, 2 Tim. iii.

5. Ah for the deep lethargy that this generation is fallen into! conversion-work is much at a stand, soul-exercise is grown a stranger to the most part; there is no growth but in naughtiness and self-conceit.

6. When gospel-ordinances and gospel ministers are contemned. Were not the gospel received in vain, the house where his honour dwells, and the galleries where he walks, would be prized; and the feet of them that bear the glad tidings would be precious. But, alas! all is contrary here. His ordinances are trampled upon, his servants are discouraged, and broken on every hand. Few want brow enough to break over the awful hedge that God has set about them: 'He that despiseth you, despiseth me.' We are as little troubled with the scrupulous in coming to us for information from the word concerning different practices, as with cases of soul-exercise.

7. When they are not thankful for it. The Lord hath done great things for us; but the generation is waxed wanton, so as there seems to be a sort of fondness to see the church in confusion again. Well, come when it will, it is like we will cool of that heat, and learn to prize what is now lightly let of.

8. *Lastly*, Most of all when Christ is not received by faith into the soul, Matth. xxii. Were there never so much strictness of life, mortification, reeling amongst the affections, and this be wanting, all is to no purpose. Unbelief, or rejecting of Christ, is the great quarrel that God pursues in time and eternity against the hearers of the gospel. But, ah! is not the preaching of Christ sapless at this day? are not our eyes held, that we cannot behold his glory? he is despised and rejected of men still.

I shall conclude with an improvement of this subject.

Take heed ye receive not the grace of God, the gospel, in vain. Two things ye would especially take heed to in this matter.

1. Take heed the gospel leave you not still out of Christ. It is certain, (1.) That the gospel finds people growing upon the old stock, and out of Christ, Ezek. xvi. (2.) That without Christ men are without hope: let them profess or be what they will, if they be not ingrafted into Christ, they are nothing, Eph. ii. 12. John xv. 6. (3.) That the gospel is the great mean appointed of God to bring sinners to Christ, the ministry of reconciliation, 2 Cor. v. 18. It is by this that sinners are brought to the marriage of the King's Son, Matth. xxii. O take heed ye receive not the gospel in vain. The cry, Can. iii. 2. ult. 'Go forth, ye daughters of Zion, and behold King Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart,' is come to your ears; beware ye sit not still. These invitations,



Psal. xxiv. 7. 'Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in;' and Rev. iii. 20. 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock: If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me;' beware they leave you not so. There is a treasure in this field, one pearl of great price in this market, and it is in your offer.

2. Take heed it leave you not without a saving change in your hearts and lives. It is impossible you can be saved without this, John iii. 3. 'Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.' Heb. xi. 14. And this gospel is the mean of it, 1 Pet. i. 23, 24, 25. Faithful ministers will be in pain till Christ be formed in people, Gal. iv. 19. What is their preaching, beseeching, exhorting, &c. but pains to bring forth? But, alas! we may sit down with that, Isa. xxvi. 18. 'We have been with child, we have been in pain, we have as it were brought forth wind, we have not wrought any deliverance in the earth, neither have the inhabitants of the world fallen.' O for that day when that promise shall be accomplished, ver. 19. 'Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise: awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.' And this is a change that must be carrying on while here, Eph. iv. 21. and that by the same means it was begun, unless ye receive the grace of God in vain, John xv. 2. O! Sirs, what branches of the old man is this knife snedding off; what hellish weeds is the gospel in its ordinary preaching to you plucking up? Sure they are not wanting in our hearts and lives, and sure there will be some execution doing on them, if ye receive not the gospel in vain.

Dear friends, God has sent you the gospel, and has set up his ordinances among you; despise not the treasure, because it is in such an earthen vessel. I would fain see the gospel doing good, a day of God's power to Ettrick again. I dare not think I have been altogether useless here: but truly, when I look upon the case of this parish in general, and on the success of my ministry in it, my heart sinks, being afraid that I have bestowed labour in vain, yea, worse than merely in vain, and God, though most justly, has dealt bitterly with me, and put a heavy, heavy piece of work in my hand. But O that the doleful effects of this reached no farther than to me! O that it were well with you, though my eyes were held not to see it for my comfort! But the works of the flesh are manifest, and continue and grow under a preached gospel, to which the appetite is lost, while the beauty and glory of practical godliness is under a dreadful vail amongst us. I would not willingly stand in the way

of your mercy; but if I be indeed the stumbling-block that lies between you and Christ and the power of godliness, I pray the Lord may remove that block out of your way, what way he thinks best, that another face for Christ, for the gospel and true godliness, might be put upon the parish of Ettrick. But stand I must in my post, till he that sent me in it call me off; and I desire to be doing while it is to-day, ere the night come on when there shall be no more working. Wonder not that this matter is laid out with this weight: We are workers together with God, and therefore have need to blush and be humbled, that we cannot be more deeply concerned that ye receive not the grace of God in vain\*. Consider,

1. We are workers with God. It is not our own but our Lord's work that we are about. God has made our Lord and Master heir of all things, and he has sent us forth to court a spouse for him. There is none that can say so much to the commendation of their Lord as we may: for he is white and ruddy, the chief among ten thousand, yea, he is altogether lovely: and there is no bride so unworthy as the daughter of Zion. And shall our Lord get the naysay off the hands of ugly, hell-hued, beggarly souls, and the prince of darkness be preferred to the Prince of Peace? Our Lord has got the gift of the kingdom from his Father, and of this land among others, Psal. ii. 8. and he has sent us out to beseech you and command you in his name to submit to our royal Master: and must we tell him, that ye will not have this man to reign over you? Luke xix. 14.

2. God works with us. We are but the voice of one crying; the Speaker is in heaven, and speaks from heaven, though by men, Heb. xii. 25. Therefore the slighting of our message is a slighting of the Lord himself. See Matth. xxviii. 20. 'Lo, I am with you alway even unto the end of the world.' Have ye never had the secrets of your hearts made manifest by the preaching of the word? why then fall ye not down before our Lord? why say ye not, We will go with you, for the Lord is with you? O fight not against God.

3. The message we bring you is the grace of God; and shall it be received in vain? This gospel,

(1.) Is most necessary grace. What a dismal darkness overclouded the world by Adam's fall, more terrible than if the sun, moon, and stars, had been for ever wrapt up in the blackness of darkness, in which we should for ever have lain, had not this grace

\* The author here plainly alludes to the distracted state of the parish, and the sea of trouble he was tossed in, on account of the unmanageable spirit of the parishioners, fed by the malignant leaven which the Old Dissenters spread through it, and of which he repeatedly and heavily complains in his Memoirs.

appeared as a shining sun to dispel it, Tit. ii. 11. So the word rendered *appeared* properly signifies. And shall we now like night-owls flee from the face of the rising sun, and like wild beasts get into our hellish dens, when this sun is up? Are we struck blind with its light, and such creatures of darkness, that we will love darkness rather than light?

(2.) It is an uncommon grace. This sun enlightens but a small part of the world. The most part are yet without the gospel; and this land had it not always. Nothing but grace brought it to, and has kept it with us. And shall we receive it in vain? Ah! will not the wild Americans think us unworthy of a place in the same hell with them.

(3.) It is the greatest grace that God ever bestowed on the world. God has given some nations gold mines, precious stones, spices, plenty of corns, &c. and he has given some the gospel without these; so that we may say of them, 'Israel then shall dwell in safety alone; the fountain of Jacob shall be upon a land of corn and wine; also his heavens shall drop down dew. Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee, and thou shalt tread upon their high places,' Deut. xxxiii. 28, 29. Barley-bread and the gospel is good cheer, if people receive it not in vain, Isa. xxx. 20, 21. There is a treasure in the gospel, Christ in it is the greatest of all mercies, Matth. xiii. 44. Ah! shall such a price be put in the hands of fools, that have no heart to it.

(4.) It is God's last grace to the world, Heb. i. 1. No other dispensation of grace shall ever the world see more. Now, Sirs, the last ship for Immanuel's land is making ready to go; therefore now or never, Heb. x. 26, 27. 'For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.' This gospel is the Lord's farewell sermon to the world. The Lord has made a feast for the world these five thousand years, and the last dish is served up now. O then receive it not in vain!

(5.) *Lastly*, It is grace that may be lost, Matth. xxiii. 37, 38. The sun of the gospel has gone down in some places, where it shined as clearly as ever it did in Scotland, and God knows if ever it rise again there. That we have received it much in vain, is plain from the heavy hand of God on us at this day in temporal calamities, Hos. ii. 9. yea, and his threatening us with the removal of the gospel, ver. 11. O then receive it not in vain; but, while ye have

the light, be walking in it: for to look no farther than the entertainment the gospel is getting at this day, it is a sad sign there is a black night abiding us: so that I think ministers and people should set themselves about it as a way-going commodity.

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THE DANGER OF NOT COMPLYING WITH THE GOSPEL-CALL.

Prov. ix. 12.—*If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself; but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.*

THIS verse is the epilogue or conclusion of the gospel-treaty with sinners, carried on with them by the messengers of Christ in his name. It is a solemn declaration or protestation that it is shut up with. The entertainment the gospel meets with, is twofold, and there are two sorts (and but two) of gospel-hearers. (1.) Compliers with the gospel-call; these are called the *wise*. (2.) Refusers; these are styled *scorners*. The declaration looks to both, and is carried as it were, after the offer is made, to every individual man and woman's door that hears the gospel. It is not, *They that are wise, shall be wise for themselves*; but hereby the Lord speaks to every one in particular, *If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself, &c.* Which class soever one puts himself into, here is his case declared. (1.) *If thou be wise*, and comply, the gain shall be thine own; it is not the Lord's, but the fruit shall drop into thine own lap. (2.) *If thou scornest*, and refusest, the loss shall be thine, it will lie chiefly at least on thine own head. So the exclusive particle is taken, Psal. li. 4. 'Against thee, thee only have I sinned.'

I design not to insist on these words, but only with them to shut up the call to the improvement of the gospel and religion which I have been giving you. Thus the great duty is laid before you: and now I would apply the words of the text unto you on this occasion, and to every one of you. Ye have heard the nature of faith and repentance, the utility of public ordinances for salvation, and the necessity of not receiving the gospel in vain. Now, sinner, what wilt thou do? wilt thou comply with the gospel-offer or not? Well, I protest and declare in the terms of the text, *If thou be wise thou shalt be wise for thyself; but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.* I shall branch out this protestation in three particulars.

*First*, If thou be no complier with the gospel-call, thou art a scorner of it: there is no mids. This is evident from the text, which divides all gospel-hearers into these two sorts. Now, thou art not a complier with the gospel-call, as long as,