

## HEARING THE WORD.

---

*Take heed therefore how ye hear.*—LUKE VIII. 18.

IN the former part of this chapter we have the parable of the sower, which is propounded, explained, confirmed, applied.

1. Propounded, from ver. 5 to 8, 'A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way-side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundred-fold.'

2. Explained. The occasion, ver. 9, 'The disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be?' The preface to it, ver. 10, 'He said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing might not understand.' To you it is given to know savingly, effectually, &c.; to others no further than to make them inexcusable. The explication itself from ver. 11 to 16, what by 'seed,' ver. 11, what by the 'way-side,' ver. 12, on the 'rock,' ver. 13, 'among thorns,' ver. 14, 'good ground,' ver. 15.

3. Confirmed, by the causes of the several events. The cause of the unfruitfulness of that by the way-side was, 1. 'It was trodden down;' 2. 'The fowls of the air,' i. e., the devil, 'devoureth, takes it away;' 3. He 'understands it not,' Mat. xiii. 19. The unfruitfulness of that on the rock was, 1. Because 'it lacked moisture,' ver. 6; 2. It 'had no root,' ver. 13; 3. 'Temptation,' ver. 13; 'affliction,' 'persecution for the word's sake,' Mark iv. 17; called the sun, Mat. xiii. That among thorns was unfruitful, because the cares, riches, pleasures of this life choked it: Mark iv. 19, 'The cares of this world, and deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things.' That on the good ground was fruitful: 1. Because 'an honest and good heart receives it;' 2. 'Understands it,' Mat. xiii.; 3. 'Keeps it;' 4. 'Brings forth with patience,' ver. 15.

4. Applied. Makes use of it by exhortation and admonition; exhorts to manifest fruitfulness; urges it by a similitude, ver. 16, and a proverb, ver. 17. 2. By an admonition, 'Take heed therefore how ye hear.'

*Obs.* Those to whom the gospel is preached must take heed how they hear; take heed as to the act, matter, manner.

1. As to the act: Take heed *that* ye hear. This is implied, and neces-

sarily supposed. The *modus* supposes the act; and expressed, ver. 8, 'He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.'

2. As to the object or matter: So take heed *what* ye hear. *How* with Luke is *what* with Mark. He concludes the parable with this admonition, chap. iv. 24, 'Take heed what you hear.' That it be good seed, as well as good ground; that this seed be the seed of God, his who sows wheat, not tares.

8. As to the manner, *How*. This is principally intended, though the other be necessary. If we hear not at all, take not heed what we hear, neglect the means, the duty, no hopes to be fruitful. If we receive not seed, we can bring forth nothing but briars and thorns, cursed fruits, destined to the fire. If you hear, but take not heed what, you miscarry. If you receive not good seed, you cannot bring forth good fruit. If tares be sown only, no reason to expect wheat. If you take heed what, but not how, all is in vain. If you receive good seed, but not in a right manner, if you hear that which is good, but not as those that are good; you must receive good seed as good ground, not as the highway, else no good will come of it. If ever you would reap benefit by hearing, you must take heed how you hear. It is in vain to hear, in vain to hear that which is good, except we hear it well.

The manner being principally intended, I shall principally insist on it. I need not go far for reasons, this chapter affords abundance.

1. Few hear well. There are not many good hearers; the most miscarry; therefore there is need to take heed. Of four sorts of hearers in the parable, three are naught, but one good. There is but one sort of good ground; the seed is lost upon three; they are barren, fruitless. Nay, in every of those three sorts there are many more bad than those that are good: 'Many are called, few chosen.' Many have common, rocky, worldly hearts, few good and honest. Though the multitude of hearers be as the sand of the sea, yet but a remnant hear well, Is. x. 22. Those that are planted by the rivers of waters are for multitude as the trees of a vast forest, yet those that bear fruit are so few as a child may write them, ver. 19. Good ground is but as a little island to the large continents of Africa, Asia, and America. The most that hear perish; few hear savingly. This should be a strong argument to take heed. If you were to shoot a gulf where millions had been drowned, not hearkening to the pilot, and but a few escaped, would you not take heed? If one should have told the Israelites, when they came out of Egypt, that if they would not hearken to Moses, all those hundred thousands should perish in the wilderness, and only two or three enter into Canaan, would they not have taken heed how they hearkened to him? The Lord gives us warning beforehand.

2. There are many enemies to oppose, and many impediments to hinder you in hearing. Where there is great danger, and much difficulty, there is reason to take heed. Here are enemies within, without, many, powerful, active, implacable; difficulties insuperable, but by almighty power, from ourselves, Satan, the world, afflictions, allurements; blindness, ignorance in the mind, no suitableness betwixt the faculty and objects, averseness to the word, 'will not see,' it is holy, just, good; the heart unclean, evil, desperately so, evil beyond knowledge; hardness, rocky, resists the word; it can take no impression, find no root; fulness, multitude of lusts, no room for the word. *Intus existens prohibet alienum*, 1 Pet. ii. 1, overgrown with weeds.

Satan opposes hearing with all his strength and craft, this being the principal means of salvation, ver. 12, he is resolute and able too; a multitude, the fowls of the air; nimble, can pick it up in an instant, immediately, Mark iv. 15. It is his meat to do it, as fowls feed on corn. He is a bird of prey; therefore, Job i. 6, 'When the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, Satan comes also among them.'

The world, this opposes on the right hand and left; on the left hand with afflictions, tribulation, persecution, hot and scorching like the sun, Mark xvi. 17; on the right hand riches, pleasures, honours, cares, for these to get them, to keep them, and lusting after them, Luke viii. 14. These are as thorns to choke it, leave no room for it to root in, no moisture to nourish it. These overtop it, crush it down; no good engrafting among thorns. The soul spends its strength and spirits upon these; no power to conceive the word, no strength to bring forth.

3. The advantage or disadvantage. This in the text, 'For whosoever hath, to him shall be given; but from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he hath.' Mark explains and applies it to the purpose: Mark iv. 24, 25, 'With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you; and unto you that hear shall more be given, for he that hath,' &c. According as you measure to God in hearing, so will he measure to you in blessing or cursing. The gospel continued, increased in light and glory, more of God's presence, Spirit, workings, motions, inclinings, more light, knowledge increased. Light to you, which is darkness to others. Comfort more refreshing; it shall be as marrow and fatness; grace more strengthening and nourishing; you shall grow up as calves of the stall. Else the candlestick shall be removed, a famine of hearing, Amos viii. 11; your pastors shall be removed into corners, Isaiah xxx. 20; the Spirit withdraw, no longer strive; light end in darkness, stench, delusions, 2 Thes. ii. 11; joy in terror, despair, lie down in sorrow, Isaiah l. 10, 11; seeming graces, fair appearances vanish, he will take away what he seemed to have; outward blessings removed, and turned into war and desolation, Satan loosed. Then no balm in Gilead, no physician, no bread of life for the dying soul, no support for the sinking sinner, no hopes, no Christ, no pool for the diseased soul, or no Spirit to trouble the waters; no manna, or no stomach; no strength or sweetness, as in the quails, 'He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their souls,' Ps. cvi. 15.

And when the gospel is gone, all outward judgments rush in. After the white horse, Christ with the gospel, neglected, comes the red horse of war, the black horse of famine, and the pale horse of pestilence, and other judgments, Rev. vi.

4. The gospel, according as it is heard, is a great mercy or a great judgment, a blessing or a curse, therefore great reason to take heed. The abuse of the greatest mercy may curse it. It lifts up to heaven or casts down to hell; it is the savour of life or of death, 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16; advances salvation or aggravates condemnation. The cords of love or the snares of death; mollifies or hardens, Mat. xiii. 14, 15, Isa. vi. 9, 10; enlightens or darkens their eyes, Rom. xi. 10, John xii. 40, ix. 39; opens the heart to Christ, or shuts it against him. If one should tell you this diet, according as you use it, will be life or death, would you not take heed? The gospel is like the water of jealousy. A bad hearer is like the adulteress, to him it is bitter water, which causeth a curse, Num. v. 19; her belly shall swell, and thigh rot; it causes tumours and rottenness, and

makes him a curse among the people. To a good hearer it is sweet, blessed, the water of life, fruitfulness, causes him to conceive seed, ver. 28. The word brings nearer heaven or further from it, it does good or hurt, makes better or worse, it is *medicamen* or *venenum*, a quickening spirit or killing letter. It returns not in vain, Isa. lv. 10, 11; 'it shall accomplish that which I please, and prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. Now he appoints his servants, as Jer. i. 10, not only to build, but to pull down; not only to plant, but to root out and destroy; and puts his words in their mouths for that end, ver. 9. It blasts those who blossom not, flourish not under it; overthrows where it edifies not; consumes, where it refines not as fire; it is a sword, either lances imposthumes, or pierces the heart savingly or mortally.

They are in a more desperate condition who hear amiss, take not heed how they hear, than those who cannot hear, those who never had the gospel. Their sin is more heinous, against clearest light, the gospel added to the law, John ix. 41, the greatest mercy, more inexcusable: John xv. 22, 'If I had not come and spoke to them, they had not had sin,' &c. The punishment is more grievous, more severe, sudden, certain. 'Under the whole heavens hath not been done as hath been done upon Jerusalem,' Dan. ix. 12. The reason is often given, 'We obeyed not his voice,' ver. 10, 14. The dregs of God's wrath was poured upon them because they had tasted the quintessence of his mercy, the gospel. No people like them in gospel enjoyments, which they not heeding, no people like them in grievous sufferings. What caused that fearful desolation, see 2 Chron. xxxvi. 15, 16, 'They despised his words, and the wrath of the Lord came on them without remedy.' 'How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?' Heb. ii. 8. The nearer to heaven any are lifted up by gospel preaching, the lower will they sink into hell if they heed it not. 'It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah,' Luke x. 12; 'for Tyre and Sidon,' the most heathenish, the most abominable people in the world, those who have been most notorious both for vile abominations and dreadful sufferings, these shall fare better in the day of judgment, and suffer less in hell than gospel despisers; cords for them, scorpions for these; the finger of justice will lie heavier on these than it lies on them, those everlasting burnings will be made seven times hotter. These shall rise up in judgment against them, Luke xi. 31. The queen of the South, 'Woe be to thee, Bethsaida,' Luke x. 12, 18, 'And thou, Capernaum,' ver. 15.

6. It is the eternal concernment of souls. Hearing is the provision made for the soul's eternal well-being, its everlasting welfare depends upon it; if you fail here, your souls perish without remedy. For salvation comes by faith, and faith comes by hearing. It is an act of eternal consequence. According to our hearing, so shall the state of our souls be to eternity. It is not a temporal interest, but eternal. As you hear in time, so shall you be to everlasting. It is not the concernment of credit, body, or estate, but of your souls immortal. If a friend should say, Take heed to my advice, and you shall live in credit, and preserve your reputation unstained, but if you will not hearken to me, you will live in perpetual disgrace and contempt, who would not diligently observe what such a friend suggests? Is there not more reason to take heed how we hear God? His word concerns eternal glory, theirs but temporary opinion and repute. If a skilful physician should come to a patient desperately sick, and assure him if he hearken to his advice he would recover, if not, he should certainly die, who would not in that case take heed to his advice? The great

Physician of souls prescribes hearing as the only way to recover our sick, desperately diseased souls. Shall we not take heed how we hear? The gospel preached holds forth a sovereign receipt for a dying soul; shall we not hear and take heed how? There is no hope for your souls but in Christ, no benefit by Christ but by faith, no faith but by hearing. If we miscarry in hearing, not only our estate, or bodies, but souls miscarry, and perish eternally without recovery. Is it not reason to take heed how we hear? Shall we be heedful to advice for body and estate, and not for our souls; for temporals, and not for eternals?

7. The gospel preached is the word of God, not of man, though by man; God is the fountain, man but the conduit-pipe; he the author, man the instrument; it is the sun his light, they the medium. The word of God is not that only which is written, but that which is equivalent to it, as the translations, *verbum*, though not *verba Dei*. That which is agreeable to it, if not expressed in the same words which are in Scripture, yet if in others, so as to express the mind of God, his intention; it is his word if it be his sense and meaning, though not tied to the form of words in which it is written. An ambassador sent from a king to a foreign state with short instructions to transact public affairs, though he do not tie himself to the words and letters of his instructions, if he express the meaning, and prosecute the intentions of his master in words of his own at large, yet are they received as the words or message of his master. Ministers are Christ's ambassadors, 2 Cor. v. 20, who speak the word of God, Heb. xiii. 7. That which is deducible from it by just consequence, that which is drawn from Scripture by necessary consequence, is Scripture. That which follows from the word of God is the word of God, if not directly, yet by consequence. Christ justifies consequences by his own practice; being to prove the resurrection by Scripture, he proves it by consequence: 'God is the God of the living,' Mat. xxii. 32, Luke xx. 37. That which we draw from the words of men by consequence is not always their judgment, for man is short-sighted, of a narrow understanding, and therefore cannot see all that may be drawn from his words; but the Lord's understanding is infinite and immensely comprehensive; when he spoke and inspired his word, he foresaw all possible consequences, and will own them which are just to be his word as well as the letter from whence they are drawn. If he should have spoke at large, and expressed all that is consequent, the world would not have contained the books. He expressed his mind in brief for our convenience, and has appointed, and enabled, and authorised his servants, his deputies, to explain, to enlarge, to deduce, apply, what would have been impossible or inconvenient to have delivered at large. He gives his word in Scripture as a lump of precious metal, more precious than gold, appoints ministers to beat it out into large plates; and as gold is the same in the lump and mass and in the plate, so is the word the same word of God as it is read and as it is preached; he gives us his word in the Scriptures as honey in the comb, he appoints the ministers of the gospel to squeeze it out, it is the same honey in the comb and out. Only take this caution, that the gospel preached be received as the word of God, it is required he that preaches it should be sent by God, invested with his authority, appointed to be his vicegerent, sent as ambassador from him, otherwise doctrine agreeable to God's word cannot be delivered authoritatively as the word of God; it is like silver, though precious in itself, yet not current, not money, without the magistrate's stamp and impression. A private man may deliver things agreeing with the instructions of an ambassador, yet

no state will look upon them as the words of a king, because he is not authorised by him to deliver them.

Now ministers are sent by Christ: 'Go, teach,' Mat. xxviii., made Christ's vicegerents, have the honour and authority of ambassadors; they are Christ's mouth, *χίλις τοῦ Χριστοῦ*, deputies, *vice-Christi*, as they are called. 'No man takes this honour to himself, but he that is called' to it. They are furnished with abilities, 'I am with you,' 'in you,' Mat. x. 40, Luke x. 16, John xiii. 20.

That therefore is the word of God which is equivalent, agreeable to, deducible from it, when delivered by those who are sent with authority from Christ to preach it. Such is the gospel which has long and is daily preached to you. Take heed, then, how ye hear, for it is the word of God.

It is more than if it were the word of a king, the greatest potentate. Yet in the word of a king there is power; it is as the roaring of a lion, strikes dead,\* reverence into hearers. What heed would one take to hear a king; how composed, how reverent, attentive, obsequious; but what is it then to hear the King of kings, Lord of hosts, Prince of the kings of the earth, in comparison of whom all kings are not so much as worms!

It is more than if one from the dead should speak to us, as is plain in the parable, Luke xvi. 31, 'They have Moses and the prophets,' who, being authorised to speak from God, and as God, do deserve so much reverence, obedience, attention, as if they will not hear them, if they do not respect my word from them, my authority in them, it cannot be expected they should mind one from the dead; though one from the dead might tell them his experience, yet this might be as soon questioned, and more easily evaded than those sent by me.

It is more than if an angel from heaven should speak, Gal. i., if not sent; if he spoke never so heavenly, seraphically, yet if it do not agree with the word, the word of God in the mouth of the meanest worm would be better entertained, Gal. i., Heb. ii. 1-8. How attentive and heedful would we be if an angel should speak with the tongue of angels; much more when God speaks, when it is the tongue of God.

Nay, it is better far, than if God himself should appear and speak immediately: his glory, his majesty would affright us. None can see him and live. Israel at Sinai, Exod. xx. 18, 19, and xxiv. 17. The sight of the glory of the Lord was like devouring fire. Shall we despise this treasure, because in an earthen vessel; this light, because it appears in an elementary body; this water of life, because it passeth through a leaden pipe?

However we receive it, he looks upon it, accounts it his word; and he will resent it more heinously, in some respect, as he speaks by men, than if it were spoke by himself; for he condescends to our weakness, speaking to us by one of ourselves. So we condemn not only his word, but his mercy, in delivering his word in such a familiar way. We might pretend fear if he should speak immediately, durst not hear; but now, speaking by one of us, there is no excuse. If we will not take heed how and what we hear, it is because we will not. Hearers, generally, are guilty of a sin proportionable to the sin of the Jews. There is a like mistake about *verbum Domini* with us, as there was about *Verbum Dominum* with them. They took not the Word for God, because it appeared in flesh; we receive not the gospel as the word of God, because delivered by flesh. Their mistake was fatal and woeful. They crucified the Lord of life, because in the

\* Qu. 'dread'?—ED.

likeness of sinful flesh ; we trample under foot the word of life, because it proceeds from sinful flesh. The mistake was their ruin, and so it will be to us. Come to hear, as expecting God to speak, hear it as the word of the great God.

8. It is that by which you must be judged at the last day : Judge, &c., according to this gospel, Rom. ii. 16, John xii. 48. The sentence is already passed in the gospel : ' He that believes shall be saved,' &c. The execution accordingly will be at the last day ; evidence will be brought in by the gospel. Herein, will Christ say, was laid open the way of life ; herein discovered the paths of death ; herein unbelief, impenitency, disobedience, were noted as damning sins, yet you would not avoid them, Luke viii. 17. ' Nothing is secret that shall not be made manifest, neither any thing hid that shall not be made known.' At the day of judgment, an account of every sermon will be required, and of every truth in each sermon : of every idle word we must give account, Mat. xii. 36. If of every idle word, much more of every idle act ; if accountable of what we speak to others, much more of what God speaks to us ; if of unedifying speaking, much more of unprofitable hearing. The books will be opened, all the sermons mentioned which you have heard, and a particular account required, why you imprisoned such a truth revealed, why you committed such a sin threatened, why neglected such duties enjoined. The gospel, at the last day, if neglected, will plead you inexcusable. ' If I had not come,' &c., ' you had no sin.' You cannot say, *Si scissem, fecissem*. Oh what a fearful account ! So many sermons slept, not regarded, prejudiced, hated, forgotten, unpractised.

We must give account of all talents, all enjoyments, how improved, time, parts, riches. If of common mercies, much more of special, extraordinary. None like the gospel, no account therefore so exact. Other mercies are but as one talent, the gospel as five in proportion to one. If he that improved not one, received such a heavy sentence, what shall he expect who neglects, hides, improves not five ? ' If every transgression and disobedience,' in the use of less mercies, ' receive a just recompence of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect' the gospel, ' which at first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by those that heard him ?' Heb. ii. ' Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we hear.' No wrath so fierce as God's for the contempt of mercy, and of the greatest mercy in the gospel ; no plea, no excuse, no escaping.

*Use.* Reproof to those that will not hear, neglect opportunities, make light of it. If it be a duty to hear well, it is a sin not to hear. If it be a sin not to hear right, it is a great sin not to hear at all ; it is a common sin, national sin, threatens ruin to the gospel. Heathens and savages more forward than we ! Manna is loathed, light hated. The sin of this place ! A thin congregation makes me jealous with a godly jealousy, out of love to your souls. Are not you absent upon small occasions ? A little rain, cold season, small employments, prejudice against God's messengers, keep you at home. Is not this to make light of the gospel ? Others compass sea and land, run from sea to sea, to hear ; you will not stir out of doors. Read the parable, Mat. xxii. A king made a feast at the marriage of his son, sent his servants to invite guests : they made excuses ; one had married a wife, &c. What was the issue ? The king was wroth, sent out his armies to destroy and burn their city, not one of them should taste of his supper. God in the gospel offers to espouse us to his Son, to feast us

with fat things, the pleasures of his house; invites us. If we neglect, we shall never taste of Christ. The children of the kingdom shall be cast out. It will be with you in this nation, and this place, as with the Jews: he turned from them to the Gentiles. He will take Christ and the gospel from you and give it to Americans; and when the gospel is gone, then look for destruction and desolation. The Lord convince you of the sinfulness of this sin!

1. It is a high contempt of God, of Christ. Contempt is the highest degree of dishonour; God is jealous of this. Men cannot endure it, much less God; he is infinitely above us, we are worms; he stands in no need of us. It is for our good, our happiness: it is God contemned in his dearest and most glorious manifestation, mercy, bowels. If a great king should send an ambassador to a poor impotent man lying on a dunghill, a stranger, an enemy to him, to offer reconciliation, to adopt him, to make him heir of his kingdom, if this wretch should refuse to hear him, would it not highly exasperate him? So it is here; the Lord sends to us lying in our blood, poor, blind, &c. Mercy slighted, turns into the greatest fury. The arm of God's vengeance will fall heavier upon gospel-slighters than upon any persons in the world. 'It shall be more tolerable for Sodom,' Luke x. Why, might they say, it is but man that delivers it; if it were God, we might expect severity. Nay, it is all one: he adds, 'He that hears you, hears me.'

2. If you will not hear God now, God will not hear you in the time of distress, though you may make many prayers, Isa. i. 15. He will send you to the gods whom ye have served: Isa. lxvi. 4, 'I will bring their fears upon them; because when I called, none did answer; when I spake, they did not hear: but they did evil before mine eyes,' &c. Isa. lxx. 12-14, 'I will number you to the sword, and ye shall all bow down to the slaughter: because when I called, ye did not answer,' &c. 'He will laugh at your destruction,' Prov. i. 24-31, Jer. vii. 14-16. The time may come, when all outward refuges and supports will fail, at least on your deathbed, when it will be in vain to call to men and angels. If you then cry for pardon, mercy, the Lord will stop his ears; you heard not him in health, life, and he will not then hear you. Nay, at the day of judgment, when you, with the foolish virgins, knock at the gate of heaven, and say, Lord, open, deliver me from these everlasting burnings; Oh save me from these tormentors who are ready to hale me into endless torture. Nay, Christ will say, You would not hear me when I invited, beseeched, nay, and wept over you; now I will not hear you. Then you shall hear nothing but that dreadful sentence, 'Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting burnings,' &c. If this terrible sentence must be denounced and executed upon wretches, because they did not feed, clothe, and visit Christ, much more against those who would not so much as hear him. Lord, hear me, or I perish, I sink into the bottomless pit, I shall be haled into outer darkness. Nay, you would not hear: he will hear no plea, no excuse.

3. Consider the state of the damned, those who, for neglecting the light, are cast into outer darkness. With what torture and anguish do they look upon their neglect of the gospel! Read the parable of Dives, Luke xvi. Lay your ear to hell, and hear those forlorn creatures cry out against this sin, as that which has damned them, sunk their souls into endless miseries. Suppose you heard them say, Oh that we had esteemed the gospel! Oh that we had more regarded the Lord's messengers! Oh that we had hearkened to the voice of Christ in them! Then might we have escaped



that wrath which was once to come, but now is upon us; but now it is too late; alas, it is too late, the day of our visitation is shut up in eternal night! But oh if it were possible that time might be recalled, and a revenging God appeased, oh what would we give to hear the word of reconciliation from the most despised minister! We would give our estates; our health, our liberty, would be thought a small matter to part with for such advantage. Oh what would we do to hear but the least hope offered in the gospel! We would run from sea to sea, watch night and day, spend time, and strength, and means, upon condition we might but hear one gospel sermon, Christ once more offer peace to us! Oh what would we suffer, to redeem one of those many neglected opportunities! We would endure a thousand years' torments for one hour's time; a thousand years' darkness for one minute of gospel light; a thousand years' burning for one encouraging word from Christ, ten thousand of which we formerly alighted.

But there is no hope for them, despair is part of their torture: yet can they not choose but be astonished at the desperate carelessness of men on earth, who will not hear, though this sin have sunk millions into hell; who will take any excuse, any occasion to be absent, when Christ is offering life and reconciliation; for hopes of a little gain, hazard the loss of their souls; for a little ease, expose themselves to eternal torments. It is too cold to hear the word, but you will find an alteration in hell; that will be hot enough, seven times hotter for you then. A little rain or snow will keep you at home when Christ speaks; but how will you endure that horrible tempest, which the Lord will rain upon gospel contemners? A flood of brimstone will be poured on you, kindled by the Lord's fiery indignation.

*Use II.* Exhortation to this duty. It is a duty of Christ's enjoining, and to his disciples.

To further the practice of it, I shall, 1, remove impediments that hinder; 2, prescribe means to facilitate and direct.

1. The impediments are ignorance, contempt, distractions, prejudice, obduration, bad ends or principles.

(1.) *Ignorance* in the mysteries of the gospel, the principles of religion: 'Without knowledge the heart is naught,' Prov. xix. 2. Now the seed of the word is not well received, but into a good and honest heart, ver. 15. This is one of the defects in those who receive the seed, as the high-way, they understand it not, Mat. xiii. 19; and therefore are more obnoxious to the wiles of that wicked one: none so fit a subject for Satan to delude, to work upon, as ignorants; we are easily deceived in that, and deprived of that, of which we have not knowledge. Ignorance is darkness spiritual, and darkness is Satan's element; he is the prince of darkness; he has most advantages to act there, most nimbly, dexterously, and advantageously. Ignorance hinders the operation of the word upon conscience, will, affections; it is a thick, gross medium, which either much weakens, or quite obstructs the influence of the gospel. Conscience, not awakened, sleeps on, darkness serves the sleepy temper. On the will; will not yield to he knows not what, nor admit he knows not who. On the affections; a blind man is not affected with colours, how rare and orient soever; set before him the most exquisite pictures, the most curious pieces, that art can frame, they move him not. In the gospel, Christ and sin, grace and the world, are set out in their own colours, but to no effect, till the eye be opened, and the scales of ignorance removed: 'The God of this world has blinded

the minds of them which believe not,' 2 Cor. iv. 4; 'My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge,' Hos. iv. 6; the mind is not opened but by the key of knowledge, Luke xi. 52; be sensible of it, bewail it, use all means to get knowledge, reading, conference; dig for it as for hidden treasures, above all for the knowledge of Christ, as Paul.

(2.) *Contempt of the gospel.* That which we despise, we heed not. If we think it not worth hearing, we will not take heed how we hear; say not you are innocent, the best are incident to it: 2 Sam. xii. 9, Nathan to David, 'Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight?' Not hearing, is evil doing, either initially, or causally, or formally; it is the beginning, or cause, or the same with evil. Contempt is the natural issue of pride, and pride is the enemy of hearing, Jer. xiii. 15-17, 'Hear ye, &c., be not proud;' Jer. v. 5, 'Broken the yoke, and burst the bonds.' We must deny our own excellencies and understandings, and in the apprehension of the glory of the gospel, and the glory of that God who delivers it, lie low and tremble: Ezra x. 3, 'Tremble at the commandment of our God;' and ix. 4, 'Every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel,' Isa. lxvi. 2; a sweet promise, 'To this man will I look, that is poor, and of a contrite spirit,' &c.; 'Though heaven be his throne,' &c.; and ver. 5, 'Hear the word of the Lord, ye that tremble at his word.' Others will not.

Nor is this a legal temper; see it in the gospel, 2 Cor. vii. 15. The Corinthians received Titus with fear and trembling; not Christ, nor Paul, but Titus, an inferior teacher; and the Corinthians did it out of awful apprehensions of God, and not eye the instrument alone, having high raised thoughts of the gospel, 2 Cor. iii. The most glorious manifestation that ever was vouchsafed, which the angels desire to pry into, *παράκλησις*, 1 Pet. i. 12. Principalities and powers think it not below them to be taught by the gospel, Eph. iii. 10; look on it as the gospel of peace, the word of reconciliation, of life, nothing but death without it; of salvation to those who would otherwise perish; of glory, else hell. What low condescensions of God in the gospel! What high exaltation of man, promises, privileges, relations.

(8.) *Distractions.* Wanderings, roving of mind, will, affections, senses, caused by the cares of the world and lusts of the flesh; carefulness of other things makes careless of the word. It is hard to hit a moving object, a bird in flight; as well, to as much purpose, sow the waves in a tempest, or cast seed upon branches tossed with the wind, as preach to a distracted, wandering hearer; nothing fixes, sinks, abides; his soul is like a highway, every man or beast has free passage. What encouragement has the husbandman to sow there? It is impossible, while it is crowded; and if clear, yet being open, it would be trodden down.

Fix your whole soul on God. *Hoc age.* Let there be no thoughts, projects, motions, affections, but what is suitable to, or raised by the word; summon the whole soul to wait, to attend to God; watch, that ye be not surprised; if any intrude, cast them out, drive them away: 'Keep thy heart with all diligence,' Prov. iv. 23. What an affront would it be to turn your back on a king, or to discourse with others while he is speaking to you! The postures and motions of your souls are as visible to God as your outward one to another. Deal with wandering thoughts, extravagant motions, as Abraham did with the fowls which came down upon his sacrifice, Gen. xv. 11, he drove them away; wandering thoughts, like these fowls, would spoil our sacrifices; they are a progeny of devils, Satan has

that name in the parable; they are his emissaries; bid them as Christ, 'Avoid, thou art an offence to me;' drive these fowls away. We must serve God with our whole heart, not suffer it to be divided, distracted, especially in the act of worship: 'My heart is fixed,' says David, Ps. ix. 1; Ps. cxix. 10, 'I will praise the Lord with my whole heart;' 'Unite my heart to fear thy name,' Ps. lxxxvi. 11.

(4.) *Prejudice.* An ill conceit of the gospel; the matter, or the manner of delivery, plainness, simplicity; or ministers, their persons, conversation, office, or execution of it. This was the ruin both of Jews and Gentiles, hindered them from hearing, or made the hearing ineffectual, though preached by Christ himself, or the apostles extraordinarily assisted. The gospel, and the prime subject of it, Christ, was 'to the Jews a stumbling-block, to the Greeks foolishness;' the gospel, when preached by extraordinary agents, when confirmed by miracles; much more now. The Jews were prejudiced against Christ his person; he answered not their expectation. They looked for a glorious monarch, not one in the form of a servant; his calling, not sent of God, an impostor, deceiver, blasphemer; his conversation, his country: 'Can any good come out of Nazareth?' His doctrine, too plain, too severe, taxing abuses. Paul was a babbler to the Athenians.

To remove it, consider there is no reason, no room for prejudice against the gospel; those that despise it never saw its glory, nor tasted its sweetness: 'If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost,' 2 Cor. iv. 3; shall we think worse of the sun, because a blind man speaks against it, because an owl cannot behold it? and for ministers, there is glory enough in the gospel to gild them, how mean soever. To neglect the gospel, for their weakness or infirmities, is to refuse to take up manna because it falls on the ground; if there be any fault in them, they must bear it, it will be no excuse to you. Those who would not hear Judas, were no less guilty than those who would not hear the other disciples; Christ makes no distinction, either in his commission or sanction; those were equally threatened who received not him as the rest. Prejudice, when there is some ground for it, does not excuse; but for the most part it is groundless. I am apt to think, where there is a call, there can be no ground of prejudice; therefore, if there be any ground of prejudice, it must be something that may make the calling questionable.

Now those things from which we raise prejudice, are not sufficient to make a minister's calling questionable; for those objections, which are ordinarily made use of to this end, Christ or the apostles themselves are liable to.

Meanness, or despicableness of the person. Christ a carpenter's son, no beauty in him, &c. The apostles fishermen.

Ambition, affectation of superiority. Christ's disciples contend who shall be greatest.

Hypocrisy, covetousness. These were in Judas, yet he was called.

Weakness. The disciples had no acquired parts, their education would not admit it, they were ignorant of many truths.

Difference in judgment and affections. The stumbling-block in these times, yet visible in Peter and Paul, Gal. ii. 11, and Barnabas and Paul, Acts xv. 39. The contention so sharp as they parted asunder.

Carnalness, looking for a temporal kingdom and preferment thereby. Fear of suffering, all forsook him. Intemperate zeal, they call for fire from heaven.

(5.) *Obduration* : hardness of heart. 'To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts,' Heb. iii. 7, 8; Pharaoh heard not Moses, for his heart was hardened. We sow upon rocks; no hopes of fruit, where neither root nor moisture; it should be an 'engrafted word,' James i. 21; can one engraft upon stone? It should 'dwell in us richly,' Col. iii. 16; the heart is hardened by sinning against light. When the gospel reveals this to be sin, and that a duty, and no regard to practise this, or avoid that, the first brings the first degree; and after the more neglects, the more hardness, till the conscience grow senseless, and, as it were, cauterized. The Lord for this sin hardens judicially, withdraws mollifying influence, and exposes to occasions that harden.

Take heed of sinning against light, disobeying the gospel. Be not disobedient to the heavenly vision. Urge the covenant, whereby God is engaged to take away the heart of stone, Ezek. xxxvi. 26. Plough up the fallow-ground, Jer. iv. 8, Hos. x. 12. Make use both of law and gospel, that to break, this to melt. The heart must be softened, then broken, then melted, that it may be cast into the mould of the word. The image of Christ is stamped on the word, it must leave impressions of Christ on us; therefore we must be cast, delivered into it, Rom. vi. Hereby it transforms, Rom. vi. 17, obeyed from the heart. Observe what considerations do soonest affect, judgment or mercy, promise or threatening, and make use of that which is most effectual.

Look upon hardness as the greatest judgment, more fearful than any temporal sickness, poverty, blindness, sword, &c., a sign of reprobation, an earnest of hell. Desire, with all importunity, a tender, melting, bleeding heart, trembling, yielding to every stroke, receiving every impression, running into the mould, complying, obeying.

(6.) *Bad ends and principles*, motives or reasons inducing to hear, these make every act good or bad. Take heed to these. We take not heed how we hear, when we hear.

[1.] Out of custom, because others do it. It is the fashion of the nation, and he that runs not with the stream hazards his reputation. He that hears but thus, will never take heed how he hears. Yet, which is lamentable, this is the ground upon which the greatest part found both their religion and the exercises of it. Why are most protestants? Their parents, their magistrates, the major part are so; not weight of reason, but number of professors. So for religious exercises, hearing, praying, singing; not for any necessity, excellency, or spiritual advantage, but because others do it. And this is the cause of inconstancy in religion, and negligence and formality in the duties of it. He that will be religious, hear, &c., only because the most do so, shall receive that reward which the most do.

[2.] To carp, cavil, ensnare, take advantages. So the Pharisees to Christ. Make a man an offender for a word. It is the practice of the devil, he hears, observes, that he may accuse, disquiet, ensnare. To pervert it in such a horrid way makes you worse than the devil, the word was never intended for his advantage.

[3.] To please the fancy, perfect intellectuals, to get notions, to satisfy itching ears; *placere*, not *sanare*; neat expressions, apt similes, quaint notions, please more than wholesome words. This is to abase the gospel, and bring it down to base ends, which was appointed for the highest.

[4.] To satisfy conscience, if convinced it be a duty enjoined under penalty, and conscience not asleep, dare not omit. Or to pacify conscience, to expiate a week's sin with one act of service.

Get right principles. Propound the best, the highest motives. Act upon spiritual grounds. Be armed by spiritual reasons.

God's glory, Jer. xiii. 16. Hearing brings glory to God, acknowledges many of his attributes, authority, truth, mercy, our subjection to him. It is an act of worship naturally engaging.

Our good. Our necessity of it as new-born babes. Come as the Israelites to gather manna. It is the bread of life, water of life. Come as to the pool. Consider the excellency of it. Hear the word out of love and delight: Ps. cxix. 127, 'I love thy commandments above gold.' 'Oh how I love thy law!' Ps. cxix. 97. If the law, much more should we love the gospel. It is 'sweeter than honey,' Ps. xix. 10. 'As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God, &c. Oh when shall I come and appear before God?' Ps. xlii. 1, 2. Ps. lxxxiv. 10, 'A day in thy courts is better than a thousand.' Consider the spiritual advantages of it, light, life, strength, growth, comfort, peace, glory. It is an inestimable treasure and mine, an universal remedy, *πανράγουσος*, the choicest dainties, an all-sufficient magazine, an infallible oracle.

## 2. Directions how to hear.

(1.) Get a punctual knowledge of the state of your souls in reference to God. Every man is either in a state of nature or grace, regenerate or unregenerate, either in the faith or in his sins. Now before you can hear aright, you should know in which of these states you are. The reason is this, we must take heed how we hear, that we may hear fruitfully, that the word may be profitable. It is most profitable when it is seasonable. It cannot be seasonable to you (whatever it be in itself), except you be acquainted with your soul's condition. It is seasonable in itself when it is suitable to a hearer's condition, but it is not seasonable to him, except he know it to be suitable, which he cannot do except he know what his condition is. 'A word in due season, is like apples of gold in pictures of silver,' Prov. xxv. 11. It is precious, lovely, excellent, profitable, adorning, and enriching. It requireth the tongue of the learned to speak seasonably, Isa. i. 4. It requireth a learned heart to hear seasonably. Indeed, this is requisite to every spiritual service, whether we pray, read, receive, else we offer the sacrifice of fools. Paul in another sense, 1 Cor. xiv. 8, 'If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?' It is uncertain, when it is not known what it means, or whom it concerns. The sound of the gospel is uncertain, when hearers know not whom it concerns, know not whether them or no. Ministers speak in the air, to no purpose. And ver. 11, 'If I know not the meaning of the voice, he that speaks is a barbarian,' &c.

It is dangerous. If a man, not knowing his temper and constitution, come into an apothecary's shop, where are receipts of all sorts, he might, through ignorance of his complexion, take that which would be poison to him, though healthful to another. The word offers that which is proper to every condition. That which is not proper is destructive. If you know not your condition, you may undo your souls, apply promises for threatenings, persuade yourselves of God's love when in a state of enmity, conclude for heaven when heirs of wrath. As you love your souls, follow the apostle's advice, 2 Cor. xiii. 5: 'Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith, prove your own selves.' The duty is ingeminated and enforced with a reason, 'Know you not your own selves, how that Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates.'

(2.) Before you hear, endeavour to get your souls into a capacity of

hearing fruitfully, to get spiritual advantage by hearing. Take pains with your hearts in private before ye come, make them tender, fit to receive impressions. Set them open, that Christ may come in. Make room, empty them of sin and vanity, that the Spirit may work freely, with liberty, without interruption. Get them melted in prayer, sublimated, raised by meditation. If you seek the Lord there, he will find you here. If you meet him in private, he will come along and continue with you.

You expect no increase from seed if it be cast into the ground before it be ploughed and broken up. You must get the fallow-ground of your hearts broken up before you come to receive the seed of the word: Hos. x. 12, 'Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy, break up the fallow ground; for it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you.' If you would sow rightly, and reap in mercy, you must break up, &c. How is that? Seek the Lord by heart-breaking, heart-melting prayer; then he will rain righteousness, rain peace and holiness; not in drops, but showers, Jer. iv. Sow not among thorns, pluck them up, cast them out, cares, pleasures, lusts; else no room for the good seed; they will choke it. Say to them, as Abraham to his young men going to sacrifice, Gen. xxii. 5, 'Abide you here, and I will go yonder and worship, and come again to you,' if lawful. Let not your hearts be as the highway; that seed prospered not which fell there. Enclose your hearts with holy thoughts, awful apprehensions of God. He is a jealous God, and will be sanctified. Common hearts are profane hearts; there must be a separation; you must fence your hearts against the inroads of the world.

Let not your hearts continue rocky; if they are, though the seed may abide there, yet it cannot take root. Get them mollified, melted, that they may receive impressions from the mould of the word. By conversing in the world, we contract hardness and pollution; though it make us not altogether incapable of fruitful and familiar converse with God in ordinances, yet it many times leaves but a remote capacity. To remove this requires extraordinary presence and working, which we have no reason to expect. Green wood will not quickly nor easily take fire if we would kindle it suddenly; the matter must be dry. We must get our hearts warmed in private, that we may be kindled in public, so as our hearts may burn within us when he speaks to us. Those who have experience of the Lord's presence and workings, find there is a vast difference, as to the efficacy of the word, when they come negligently and preparedly. When they step immediately out of the world into God's presence, their interviews are not so delightful, so advantageous, the word not so powerful, melting, inflaming, as when they have endeavoured to dispose their hearts for so great a work.

(8.) Receive the word, and every part of it, as concerning thee in particular. Set thyself as in God's presence, and persuade thyself that he speaks to thee; hear it, as believing that God designed it, cut it out for thee. God aims at thee, intended it and put it into the mouth of his messenger on purpose for thee. It is Satan's policy to persuade, that he may render it ineffectual, the word belongs to others, not to me. It is certain there is no truth delivered, no sin threatened, no duty enjoined, no state discovered, but it concerns every one, and therefore thee in particular, and God sends it on purpose to thee; for if a sparrow do not fall to the ground but by God's appointment, surely there is no word proceeds from the mouth of God but out of design. If providence reach less things, much

more greater. If thou must give an account for every word thou hearest, sure every word concerns thee; for God is not imprudent or unjust, &c. Hear it then as spoke to thee, as sent to thee.

The word never is effectual but when it is particularly applied; when thy soul is opened to receive it, as Lydia's; when thy heart is pricked, as Peter's hearers. Now *generalia non pungunt*, generals affect not. Now ministers, in public auditories, can but speak generals; they must not name men, and say, as Nathan to David, 'Thou art the man.' Though it be their duty, and they endeavour to speak punctually to every man's condition, which is *ὁμορομνή τὸν λόγον*, yet that which is most particular as from them is but a general notion to thee; if thou apply it not, receive it not as spoken to thee. If there be not a receptive faculty in every particular soul, in every member of the mystical body, as there is in every part of the natural body, this spiritual food will never nourish. A surgeon bids apply a salve to a sore hand; the hand casts it off as fitter for the head; is there any hopes of a cure? A physician prescribes physic to a sick man; he refuses to take it, and says his neighbour stands in more need of it; so if you, when threatenings are denounced, say such a man indeed is a great sinner, this may belong to him, but I thank God I am not so bad, I am not as other men, &c., this is a dangerous stratagem of Satan, to make the word unprofitable. The word, whenever it does good, enters into the heart, Acts xvi. 14; Ps. xl. 9, 'Thy law is within my heart;' Ps. cxix. 11, 'Thy word have I hid in my heart;' Jer. xxxi. 33, 'I will put my law in their inward parts.' Now by those means the word is kept out.

Some truths are more seasonable than others, yet all seasonable in some respect. That is seasonable which is suitable to our condition. Our condition is past, present, future, or possible. That is most seasonable which concerns the present state, others as they have an influence upon it.

*Present.* If in the state of nature, it is seasonable to shew the misery of it, and the necessity of a change.

*Past.* This may be useful to one regenerate, to make him thankful, fearful of relapsing into former sins, pitiful to others, affectionate to Christ.

*Future.* I am now in health and prosperity; but sickness and persecution will come, and it will be seasonable now to prepare for them.

*Possible.* You hear some grievous sin threatened, you are not guilty of it, but it is possible you may be; the seeds of that sin are in you. Therefore it is useful to make you watchful and dependent upon Christ, and sad for the sinfulness of your nature.

Get knowledge of your greatest wants, weakest graces, strongest lusts, worst distempers, coldest affections, difficultest encumbrances, that so you may know how to apply the word. All must be applied, but those more especially that are most seasonable. There is prudence required, to discern 'what is that good, perfect, acceptable will of God,' Rom. xii. 2. The word, if you apply it not, will no more profit than meat not eaten.

(4.) Be not satisfied with anything in hearing, but the presence of God. That special presence, when operative, makes the word effectual to the ends appointed. The presence of the Lord his glory filled the tabernacle under the law; and his presence is as abundant and glorious under the gospel. He fills now the tabernacle with his presence, when the glorious effects of his presence are sensible in the hearts of the hearers, convincing, enlightening, terrifying, humbling, melting, inflaming, comforting, strengthening,

quickenings. These are the signs of this glorious presence. It is a greater glory than the other, though not visible; it is liker to that of heaven, and more suitable to the spiritual and elevated estate of gospel spirits.

The efficacy of all ordinances, and of this in special, depends upon God's co-operating presence, their light, life, power, sweetness. No healing virtue in these waters, but when the angel of God's presence descends, and troubles the waters, whoever steps in after the troubling is made whole of whatsoever disease, John v. 4.

It is a popish delusion to expect anything, *ex opere operato*, from the work done, without respect to the manner of doing. It is a great provocation to expect *ex opere operantis*, from the preparation of the hearer or endeavours of the speaker without looking higher. All that we have to depend on, or expect from, is *opus co-operantis*, the concurrence of God. If an angel from heaven should preach, or a man with the tongue of men and angels, it would be ineffectual without co-operation. If Christ himself should again exercise his prophetic office on earth, and preach the gospel, it would have no better success than on the Jews, without divine concurrence. The word, though light in itself, is darkness to you, except the glorious presence of God scatter the clouds which benight the faculty, clear the medium, discover the object. The word, though spirit and life in itself, yet will be a dead letter to thee, except his Spirit and presence quicken it. It is as a body without a soul; it is his presence that informs, acts, enlivens. It is quick and powerful in itself, but it moves not the soul, conscience, will, or affections; these weapons are mighty through God. The affections are like the wheels in Ezekiel's vision, God's presence like the spirit of those living creatures: Ezek. i. 21, 'Whithersoever the spirit was to go, they went: for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels; when they go, these go; when they stood, these stood; when they were lifted up from the earth, these were lifted up.'

What is the reason that a truth sometimes breaks in with rays of light and evidence, which was always darkness before, though oftentimes before propounded? What is the reason some passage doth sometimes affect, move, inflame; at other times, though pressed with as much power, moves not at all? God's presence. The heart is sometimes as brass, sometimes as oil. Seek God's presence above all, avoid what hinders; mourn and lament after him. If thou goest not with us, we will not go. 'She called his name Ichabod, saying, The glory is departed,' 1 Sam. iv. 21. Cry after him, 'Oh that thou wouldst bow the heavens, and come down,' Isa. lxiv. 1.

(5.) Take heed of suppressing any good motions raised by the word. Constant hearers have experience of some convictions of sin, and resolve to leave it and mind the soul. Nourish these, take heed of smothering them. They are the blessed issues of heaven; will you stifle, murder them in the conception, make them like an untimely birth? They are buds springing from the immortal seed; will you nip them? They are sprigs planted by the hand of Christ, which would grow into a tree of life; will ye pluck them up by the roots, expose them to the frosts, break them while young and tender? They are sparks kindled by the breath of God, heavenly fire; will you quench it? They are the Spirit's breathings, strugglings, he will not always strive. They are Christ's knockings, you know not how long he will stand; will you send him away without admission? They are the Bridegroom's wooings; will you repulse him, and cause him to make no more motions? They are Christ's messengers; he sends these for trial,



prepare the way before him. What became of them who stoned and killed the messengers? Mat. xxi. 35, 41-43.

Nourish these, encourage them; the children are come to the birth, get strength to bring forth, concur with the Lord. Overwhelm them not with worldly employments, choke them not with cares, quench them not with pleasures. Drown not the voice, as the Israelites the noise of the sacrificed children; nor, as Cain, run to build cities, busy yourselves in the world, stop your ears, till God's voice be heard and accomplished. Go not from this place into worldly company, &c.; retire to your closet, blow up the sparks into a flame with prayer; digest it with meditation, cast it not up till concocted.

(6.) Come with resolution to do whatever ye shall hear, to comply with the whole will of God without reserves. There must be no more respect of truths than respect of persons. You must not deal with duties as Nebuchadnezzar with his subjects, Dan. v. 19, which you will set up, and which you will pull down. This is to exalt yourselves above God. There is a concatenation of truths and duties; if you take one link out of the golden chain, you break the whole, James ii. 10. Obedience is the sweetest harmony the Lord can hear on earth, the perfection of it is a consonancy to the divine will; if every string, every act be not screwed up thereto, there can be no concert, nothing but discord, harsh and unpleasing in his ear. You must present yourselves before the Lord as Cornelius and his company: Acts x. 33, 'We are all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God;' to hear all things commanded, and to do all things we hear. You must believe every truth revealed, avoid every sin forbidden, practise every duty commanded, without exceptions; you must not pick and choose. Every fruitful hearer has a good and honest heart, and this is a heart after God's own heart. The character of such a heart we have in David, he fulfilled *πάρα πάντα*, Acts xiii. 22.

Resolve to do what the people promised the prophet: Jer. xlii. 5, 6, 'The Lord be a true and faithful witness between us, if we do not even according to all things for which the Lord thy God shall send thee to us. Whether it be good, or whether it be evil, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God;' whether it seem good or bad to us, great or little, difficult or easy, pleasing or harsh; though it cross carnal reason, lusts, interests.

Say not, Is it not a little one? the Lord will dispense, he is not so precise as the minister. There is nothing little which the great God commands. His pure eye sees atoms, the least will damn. He is jealous; he that offends in one of these little ones, better a mill-stone were tied about his neck.

Think not anything difficult: to avoid all sin and the occasions, to exercise every grace, to keep a constant watch over heart and ways. Is anything too hard for God? He is engaged: Isa. xl. 31, 'They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength,' &c. The more difficulty, the more honour. Abraham is ready to obey in that which was grievous. Did not Christ suffer more grievous things than you can do? Is not the penalty more intolerable? Would the damned think anything too hard?

What if it cross reason? Paul consulted not with flesh and blood. Say not as the Jews, *σκληρός λόγος*: 'It is a hard saying, who can bear it?' John vi. 60. 'O man, who art thou that repliest against God?' Rom.

ix. 20. Art thou wiser than he? Is not infinite understanding the rule of his will? Captivate reason, bend the understanding to his mind.

What if it ruin thy lusts, pluck out thy right eye? Is it not better, 'more profitable, that one member should perish, than that the whole body be cast into hell?' Mat. v. 29. An honest heart counts that word most pleasant which wounds his lusts: Ps. cxli. 5, 'Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness; let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head.' He says to the word, to the minister preventing sin, as David to Abigail, 1 Sam. xxv. 32, 33, 'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me: and blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, who hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood.' Lay thy conscience bare; say, Speak, Lord; smite, Lord, with a deadly wound these thine enemies that would not have thee to rule.

What if it comport not with thy interests, profit, pleasure, credit? Is any interest dearer than thy soul's? Is it not better to deny thyself than that Christ should deny thee? What lost Zaccheus by restitution? Ask him now in heaven. What lost Moses by choosing afflictions rather than the pleasures of sin? What lost the apostles by exposing themselves to contempt? *αἰνιμαθάρματα*. They are so far from repenting, as, if they were on earth again, they would say with David, 2 Sam. vi. 22, 'I will yet be more vile than thus.' If thou make exceptions against any command, God will except thee when he dispenses eternal rewards.

It is not enough to promise God to the half of the kingdom; halting obedience will never come to heaven; all, or none. Say not, 'The Lord be merciful to me in this.' The Lord will never be merciful to any allowed disobedience: 'If any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy,'—from the words expressing God's will,—'God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city,' &c., Rev. xii. 19.

(7.) Mix it with faith: Heb. iv. 2, 'The word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.' Faith is a necessary ingredient to all spiritual services. Without faith it is impossible to please God; and that which does not please him cannot profit us. Get faith, and exercise it. Believe, 1, that God speaks; 2, to you; 3, that which is true; and, 4, good. Of the first and second I spoke formerly.

Believe the truth and goodness of what you hear; true in itself, good to you. There are two acts of faith, assent, consent; that in the mind, this in the will; the object of *that*, truth, of *this*, goodness; both necessary; that ineffectual, insufficient without this. Get to be assured of the truth and goodness of the word; all truth is excellent, this transcendent, of a higher descent; *chara Dei soboles*, it is divine, derives its original from God; comprises all other truths, and adds, *de proprio*, unspeakable excellency to them. Not only logical or moral, but divine; consists in a conformity not only with the mind of men and angels, but of the mind of God; divine intellect, infinite understanding.

So is its goodness in consonancy to the divine will; it is appetible, *δρεκτόν*, to God, so convenient and agreeable to his will, as it is called directly the will of God.

It has all degrees of goodness: *καλόν, ἡδύ, χρήσιμον*.

[1.] Holy and just, perfectly so; the rule of all holiness and justice in the world; *primum et perfectissimum in unoquoque genere, mensura reliquorum*.

[2.] Sweet: honey, manna, bread of life, water of life. It is to the soul as these would be to one dying, ready to expire for hunger or thirst.

[8.] Profitable: to make perfect, happy. Both these are applicable to assertions, commandments, promises, threatenings. The truth none but an atheist can deny. The goodness is unquestionable, if that which seems most doubtful be certain, viz., that the threatenings are good. That is clear in Hezekiah, 2 Kings xx. 19. Hezekiah said unto Isaiah, 'Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken;' notwithstanding, we may take up the prophet's complaint, Isa. liii. 1, 'Who hath believed our report?' If we did believe 'the wages of sin is death,' 'Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,' 'Except we repent, we shall perish,' 'He that is not in Christ is a reprobate,' we should follow Jehoshaphat's advice: 2 Chron. xx. 20, 'Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper.' Let it dwell in your hearts by faith.

(8.) Receive the truth in the love of it: 2 Thes. ii. 10, 'Because they received not the love of the truth,' i. e., truth in love, 'that they might be saved.' He that would hear savingly, must hear it with love; not out of fear, custom, not for by-ends, for credit, profit, preferment; but out of love to the naked truth, for its own native loveliness, without extrinsecal consideration; as the truth is in Jesus, of him, from him.

If you are moved by base ends, when these are removed, the word will be rejected. But if you are moved by the intrinsic excellency of the word; that being eternal, your actings for, and affections to, the word will be constant.

This was the cause of the inconstancy, the apostasy of the stony ground; they believed, received the word with joy while the word was in credit, while they might do it with safety, applause, and outward advantage; but when persecution arose, they fell away.

It is love that gives the word rooting. Love would have made the rock open, not content to receive it in the superficies. It unites the word to us, us to it; it is *affectus unionis*, Ps. cxix. 81; it incorporates it, it transforms us into its likeness, assimilates us to it.

Some truths challenge a special love, evangelical, spiritual, above those common to us with heathens; such as discover our happiness or misery, moral virtues; the excellency of Christ, necessity of him, way to him, privileges by him. Practical, not notional; only such as may awaken sin, nourish grace, and teach us to order our conversation. Searching; such as discover our condition, pierce conscience, unmask the soul, detect hypocrisy, and offer to our view the more refined and less visible stains of the spirit: pride, selfishness, earthliness, and other secret and little discerned evils.