

SERMON XII.

BY THE REV. NATHANAEL VINCENT, A.M.

OF CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD.

HOW WE MAY GROW IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST.

And in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.—
2 Peter iii. 18.

THE apostle, when he wrote this epistle, looked upon himself as a dying man (the ministers of the gospel would preach with more life, if death were but more within their view). His death, which was violent, (for he ended his days upon a cross,*) had been foretold by Christ himself; accordingly he was persuaded, that quickly he should be made to "put off his earthly tabernacle." But, like a good shepherd, before he departed, he expresses his care of the flock, which he was to leave behind him. He commends the gospel to them, as that which is of the highest authority, of the greatest certainty; that their faith might be firm, and that they might persevere in their obedience.

The apostle having looked as far as the grave, he looks farther: he beheld his own and likewise the world's dissolution; he plainly foresaw the end of all things; and tells them to whom he writes, that "the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night," and that "the heavens will pass away with a great noise, the elements melt with fervent heat, the earth and the works therein will be burned up:" and then most rationally infers: "Seeing all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?" (2 Peter iii. 10, 11.)

He speaks of "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." (Verse 13.) Interpreters conclude that this refers not to the substance of the world, which will remain; but to the qualities of it, which will be changed, and even at last quite purged out of it. Calvin thinks meet here to give a caution against curiosity, and too great inquisitiveness, which will be unprofitable, which may prove dangerous; and tells us that the scope of the apostle is mainly to be attended to, which is to awaken and exhort unto serious holiness.† Since this world must be purged by fire, all that are Christians should

* *Petrus cruci affigitur, capite in terram verso, elevatisque in sublime pedibus.*—*PLATINA in Vita Petri*, p. 14. "Peter was transfigured to a cross, with his head turned down toward the earth, and his feet raised upwards."—*EDIT.* † *Mali sunt interpretes qui in argutis speculationibus multum consumunt operæ, cum apostolus totam hanc doctrinam ad pias exhortationes accommodet.*—*CALVINUS ad locum.* "They are incompetent interpreters who here bestow much labour on subtle and abstruse speculations, since the apostle accommodates the whole of this doctrine to pious exhortations."—*EDIT.*

endeavour after a greater measure of purity, and ought to be "growing in grace, and in the knowledge of Christ," continually.

In the words we find :—

1. *A growth and increase urged.*—The word *αυξανε* ["grow"] supposes imperfection ; but also that perfection ought to be aspired unto, and that the Christian's growth does make him truly great.

2. This growth must be *in the knowledge of Jesus Christ.*—The object, Christ, is high and large unto infiniteness ; his fulness, his riches [are] unsearchable. The knowledge of this object must not be merely notional. *Verbum notitiæ connotat affectum.** Light and heat, clearer views and dearer and stronger loves, must go together.

3. *The persons who are to labour after a greater measure of knowledge.*—And those *are real Christians*, who have attained to some degree of spiritual understanding. That light which is as "the light of the moon," should be increased, so as to equal "the light of the sun ;" and that which is as "the light of the sun," should be augmented so as to equal "the light of seven days," should grow more and more glorious.

4. *The arguments to persuade.*—And they are two : Christ is *their Lord*, Christ is *their Saviour*.

(1.) Christ is *their Lord*.—A Lord most great, most gracious. The more this is understood, the better will his service be liked, as honourable and advantageous ; and obedience will be yielded with greater cheerfulness and constancy.

(2.) Christ is *their Saviour*.—A Saviour *from* the greatest evils,—sin and the miserable effects of it, in time, in eternity. A Saviour *to* the greatest blessedness,—an everlasting kingdom and glory. A Saviour *of* that which is most precious,—the soul, which if safe, the whole man must needs be secured.

The text may be considered with a double reference, *to what goes before, to what follows after.*

1. *To what goes before.*—"Grow in grace and knowledge," *χαριτι και γνωσει* : and hence we may observe, that the way to increase in grace is to increase in the knowledge of Christ. The means of grace will be found inefficacious and empty, will convey nothing, if Christ be not *with* them and *in* them, if he be not understood by those that use them. "All that fulness" out of which the church is replenished from the beginning of the world to the very end of it, "it has pleased the Father should dwell in Christ." (Col. i. 19.)

If a man know where a vast treasure lies hid, he may quickly go and enrich himself. The way to have more grace is, to understand that Christ is the fountain from whence all grace is derived. He is "Head over all things to his church, which is his body," and is called to show the reality and plentifulness of communication, "the fulness of him that filleth all in all." (Eph. i. 22, 23.)

2. *The text may be referred to what follows after.*—"To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen." Hence observe, that the greater knowledge of Christ [which] we attain to, the more we shall

* "The original word *knowledge* likewise denotes *affection* or *strong feeling*."—EDD.

honour, and see cause to honour and glorify, him. His Godhead is the same with the Father's; his glory and dominion equal and eternal. The church militant must now begin to glorify her Lord and Saviour; and when she comes to be triumphant, her praises will be vastly higher: and to magnify, to love, to admire, and to rejoice in him, will be her everlasting business.

But I shall wave the connexion; and from the words themselves raise this doctrine: *That it highly concerns all sincere Christians to grow and increase in the knowledge of Christ.*

The gospel which reveals Christ, is a mystery, which "the angels" themselves "desire to look into;" (1 Peter i. 12;) and, looking, they admire the manifold wisdom of God, the exceeding riches of his grace and love. And shall not *the saints* search farther into this gospel? Shall they not look more unto and into Jesus, who "took not on him the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham?" (Heb. ii. 16.) The better Christ is understood, the better will they understand how happy he has made them; and that, Christ being theirs, all is theirs.

The question that in this exercise I am to answer is this: *How we may grow in the knowledge of Christ, and make use of and improve that knowledge.* Now, that the answer may be the more full, I shall do these four things:—

First. I shall tell you, *what it is to grow in the knowledge of Christ*; and the telling you this, will tend to the advancement of this growth.

Secondly. *What properties are required in this knowledge.*

Thirdly. *The directions you are to follow, that you may increase in the knowledge of him.*

Fourthly. *What use and improvement you are to make of this knowledge, or of Christ known.*

I. I begin with the first of these: *What it is to grow in the knowledge of Christ.*

Here several propositions are to be premised:—

1. *The knowledge of Christ is of the greatest excellency.*—The apostle calls this *ὑπερῆχον τῆς γνώσεως*. "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." (Phil. iii. 8.) Other kind of knowledge is like light from the stars; this like beams from the sun. Christ is called "the Sun of Righteousness." (Mal. iv. 2.) He is called Wisdom in the abstract, (Prov. i. 20,) in the Hebrew it is חֵכְמוֹת "wisdoms;" in him is "the sum, the perfection of wisdom."* To know him does assimilate and make us like him; and when we shall have a full view of him in glory, we shall, to our utmost capacity, fully resemble him. "To know him is life eternal;" and they that seek life any other way will find death, and themselves mistaken in the end. No wonder the apostle glories in this knowledge; and that an ancient Father said, he was glad he had something of value (he meant philosophy) to despise in comparison.

* *Sapientiæ—Omnimoda sapientia.*

2. *This knowledge of Christ is of absolute necessity.**—In scripture he is compared to those things, which are so needful that we cannot be without them, as meat, and drink, and raiment. Christ is the bread of life, (John vi. 35, 48,) the fountain of living water; (iv. 14;) we are to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ;” (Rom. xiii. 14;) his righteousness is the garment which must cover and secure us. To be totally ignorant of him must needs be death eternal; for “there is not salvation in any other.” (Acts iv. 12.)

3. *The knowledge of Christ is by supernatural revelation.*—Much of God may be read in the book of nature: his visible works do make the wisdom, power, and goodness of the Worker also visible. But Christ is a “mystery hid from ages and generations;” and would have remained hid still, if the gospel had not revealed him. (Col. i. 26.) Who could ever have thought of God’s being “manifested in the flesh,” and redeeming the church with his own blood, if this had not been brought to light by the gospel? (1 Tim. iii. 16; Rev. v. 9.) These are indeed “the deep things of God,” which the Spirit reveals; (1 Cor. ii. 10, 11;) and power to discern them, and believe them, is from the same Spirit.

4. *The knowledge of Christ was communicated in a degree under the Old Testament.*—The prophets spake of him; and if they had not, what they had said besides had been insignificant. “The law was a schoolmaster to bring Israel to Christ.” (Gal. iii. 24.) *The ceremonial law*, requiring the blood of so many sacrifices, showed plainly that the sacrificers themselves deserved to die, and therefore is said to be “against them.”† (Col. ii. 14.) But withal it did direct them to the Lord Jesus, who was “to appear, once in the end of the world, to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.” (Heb. ix. 26.) *The moral law* discovered their duty, convinced them of sin, and declared the necessity of a Mediator to make an atonement. The apostle, when he witnessed, “that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light to the people and to the Gentiles;” he sticks not to affirm, that he “said none other things than those which Moses and the prophets did say should come.” (Acts xxvi. 22, 23.) Moses saw Christ and his cross; and “esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.” (Heb. xi. 26.) “Abraham rejoiced to see his day: he saw it, and was glad.” (John viii. 56.) Nay, several thousands of years before the actual rising of this Sun of Righteousness, there was some light which caused a “day-break” presently after the fall. That promise, “The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent’s head,” shows that the first Adam was not altogether ignorant of the second.

5. *The revelation of Christ under the New Testament is more clear.*

* *Stat inicta hæc rupes, Ego sum Via et nullus alius: quicquid autem via hæc non fuerit, error et lubricum et tenebræ sunt.*—LUTHERUS, tom. ii. p. 507. “This stands as an impregnable rock: ‘I am the Way,’ and beside me is no other.’ Whatever else assumes to be this way, it is but error, deception, and darkness.”—EDIT. † *Χειρογραφον τοις δογμασιν ο ην υπεραντιον ημιν.* [“The hand-writing of ordinances that was against us.”]

—Therefore to be ignorant of him is the more without apology. "The veil upon the face of Moses" did signify the obscurity of the Mosaic dispensation; but that "veil is done away in Christ;" and "we all" may now "with open face behold as in a glass the glory of the Lord." (2 Cor. iii. 13, 14, 18.) The New Testament helps us to understand the Old; and adds, *de novo*, a far more glorious light than ever shined before. God spake more by his Son, than he had done by his servants the prophets, that lived in the ages before his manifestation in the flesh. Such a clear discovery of things, which before were but darkly intimated, is a privilege which should be taken notice of, and thankfully improved. "Blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear: for verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them." (Matt. xiii. 16, 17.)

6. *All true believers in Christ have some knowledge of him.*—"How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" (Rom. x. 14.) As it was in the first creation, "God said, Let there be light: and there was light;" so it is in the new creation: darkness overspreads the soul; but God does shine into the heart, and gives the light of the knowledge of Jesus Christ. And Christ being thus revealed, the heart is taken with him, gladly opens and receives him, relies and believes in him to life everlasting. Let the church of Rome boast of the conveniences of ignorance, and the sufficiency of implicit faith; we shall show ourselves children of light by pleading for light; and it shall be our desire, that God would deliver us from the ignorance of the church of Rome, as well as from the tyranny of the bishop there.

7. *Those that know most of Christ know him but in part.*—Therefore are to be urged to grow in knowledge. The apostle Paul, who equalled James, Cephas, and John, for "in conference they added nothing to him;" (Gal. ii. 6;) who was "caught up to the third heaven," and there had "abundance of revelations," and "heard words which it was not lawful to utter;" (2 Cor. xii. 2, 4, 7;) yet humbly acknowledges, that "he knew in part, and prophesied in part," and that "he saw but through a glass darkly." (1 Cor. xiii. 9, 12.) Knowledge in this world is imperfect, as well as holiness; and where both these are true, there will be an industrious longing that both may be still carried on toward perfection.

These things being premised, I shall tell you *what it is to grow in the knowledge of Christ* in these particulars:—

1. Growing in the knowledge of Christ implies *a fuller apprehension of his Godhead*.—Here is majesty, immensity, glory, that may presently amaze and overwhelm us. Alas! it is but a small portion of this that we can understand: but this must be known,—that the self-same perfections which are in the Father are likewise in the Son; for He and his Father are one: Christ is "the true God and eternal life." (1 John v. 20.) It is a destructively heretical gloss, to say, He is styled God, only by a figure. He is affirmed to be "over all, God blessed for ever." (Rom. ix. 5.) "By him were all things created

that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible; whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers. And he is before all things, and by him all things consist." (Col. i. 16, 17.) And those excellent creatures, "all the angels of God," are commanded to "worship him." (Heb. i. 6.)

This truth that "Christ is God" is more and more to be looked into. He that denies it loses his Christianity, according to Luther,* and the prop and foundation of his faith. Here is the Rock upon which the church is built, so as "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matt. xvi. 18.) The Godhead of Christ makes his blood a price of infinite value; full satisfaction has been made to divine justice, by the payment of it. The Godhead of Christ puts merit into his obedience and sufferings, so that believers cannot ask for more than he has deserved they should receive. The Godhead of Christ gives efficacy to ordinances, so that the dead are quickened, the blind are enlightened, the weak are strengthened and confirmed. The Godhead of Christ puts life and vigour into the Christian's faith. He may safely be trusted who is "God only wise," who is "the Lord Almighty," whose "mercy and faithfulness endure for ever."

2. Growing in the knowledge of Christ implies *a clearer sight of his humanity*.—How often is he called "the Son of man," as well as "the Son of God!" One of the fathers imagined that this was the fault and the fall of the reprobate angels: a proud enviousness at the forethought of the Son of God's advancing—by taking upon him—the human nature.† And Luther supposed this was the occasion upon which Satan suggested to Mahomet in his "Alcoran,"—that many of the good angels became devils, because they refused to worship Adam.‡ It is "a great mystery of godliness, that God is manifested in the flesh." (1 Tim. iii. 16.) "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us," says the beloved disciple. (John i. 14.) He had a true body and "a reasonable soul;" which soul of Christ, considering its nearest union to the Divine Nature, and the light and joy and glory it must needs be full of, may be looked upon, by millions of degrees,

* *Necessarium est credere et confiteri articulum de Divinitate Christi; quem ubi Arius negavit necesse fuit etiam negare articulum redemptionis: vincere enim peccatum mundi, mortem, maledictionem, et iram Dei in semetipso, non est ullius creatura, sed Divinae potentiae opus. Quare negantes Divinitatem Christi amittunt tandem totum Christianismum, fiuntque prorsus Gentiles.*—LUTHERUS, tom. iv. p. 92. b. "It is necessary to believe and profess the article concerning the Divinity of Christ. When this was denied by Arius, he perceived that he must likewise deny the article of redemption. For to overcome and, in his own person, triumph over the sin of the whole world, death, the curse, and the wrath of God, is not the work of any creature whatsoever, but solely the exertion of Divine Power. Wherefore, those who deny the Divinity of Christ, at length lose the essence of Christianity, and then become complete Heathens."—EDIT. † *Diabolus lapsus est invidia illi quæ invidit hominibus tantam dignitatem quod Deus futurus esset homo.*—BERNARDUS. "The devil fell through the indulgence of that envy by which he begrudged men the enjoyment of such a high dignity as that of God about to assume human nature."—EDIT. (Heb. ii. 16.) ‡ *Videtur diabolus ipse auctori Alcorani suggestisse quod idcirco daemones facti essent ex bonis angelis, quia noluerint Adamum adorare. Hoc suum peccatum non potuit celare Satan.*—LUTHERUS, tom. iii. p. 82, b. "The devil himself seems to have suggested to the author of the Alcoran, that the good angels had been transformed into demons, in consequence of their refusal to render supreme adoration to Adam. Satan was incapable of concealing this his own peculiar offence."—EDIT.

as the highest of creatures, and "the chief of all the ways of God." (Job xl. 19.)

The Holy Ghost took care, in the conception of Christ, that his human nature should not be in the least defiled; and his whole life was perfectly free from sin: he "did no evil, neither was guile found in his mouth," and his heart was always pure. And having taken man's nature, God is well pleased with that nature in Christ: the man Christ Jesus always did those things which were pleasing to the Father. The sons of men may come with boldness to this Mediator, who "is bone of their bone, and flesh of their flesh. He bears "good-will to men," as the angels sang aloud at his nativity. Man may be confident of a kind reception, since Christ is so near a kin to them, and was "in all things," excepting sinful infirmities, "made like unto them, that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest, to make reconciliation for their iniquities." (Heb. ii. 17.) Christ is man; and this man is God's greatest favourite, far greater than Joseph to Pharaoh, or Mordecai to Ahasuerus. He has the highest place in heaven, as well as in his Father's heart. Let saints search into this truth, and they will find matters of unspeakable encouragement. Here is the way to know the Father, to worship him acceptably, and to attain to fellowship with him, here and for ever.*

3. Growing in the knowledge of Christ implies *a more plain discerning and full persuasion, that he was fore-ordained to be a Redeemer.*—Christ was the person pitched upon from eternity to be the Saviour of the elect of God: "Who verily was fore-ordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you." (1 Peter i. 20.) He is therefore called "the elect one" in whom God's soul delights. (Isai. xlii. 1.) There was a compact and agreement made between the Father and the Son. The Son agrees in fulness of time to be made of a woman, to take a body, to offer up himself without spot to God; and the Father promises eternal life and salvation, and that he should have a church given him out of the world, (though the world is fallen into wickedness,) upon which church this eternal life is to be bestowed. The prophet Zechariah tells us of a counsel of peace between the Lord of hosts and Christ, "whose name is The Branch." (Zech. vi. 12, 13.) And the apostle speaks of "the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before the world began." (Titus i. 2.) This promise may very well be conceived to be made to the Son, that he should give eternal life to all that were given him of the Father. And when the saints behold that Christ is the person from eternity designed to be a Saviour, they may conclude that

* *Extra Christum oculos et aures claudatis. Ubi Jesus est, ibi est totus Deus seu tota Divinitas, ibi Pater et Spiritus. Extra hunc Christum Deus nusquam invenitur. Deus in carne illa sic apparet, ut extra hanc carnem coli et cognosci non possit.*—LUTHERUS, tom. iv. p. 491, a. "Close your eyes and ears against every object but Christ. Wherever Jesus is, there is the whole Godhead or the entire Divinity; for there is likewise the presence of the Father and of the Holy Spirit. Except in this Christ, God is nowhere to be found by mortals. God is become so manifest and resplendent in this flesh, as to render it impossible for him, when divested of it, to be known and worshipped."—EDIT.

God hath a love to them, a care of them, and a purpose of grace toward them from everlasting : and how securely and sweetly may they rest upon the blessed Jesus, not doubting but he is a person every way fit and sufficient to finish that work of redemption, which he undertook according to the appointment of his Father !

4. Growing in the knowledge of Christ implies *a greater insight into his sufferings*.—It is not without reason that the history of these is so largely penned by all the four evangelists. Certainly there is much in his crucifixion which it concerns believers to pry into. The sufferings of Christ were great, and that both in his body and in his soul. His body was in a bloody sweat, and his soul was amazed sore, and full of heaviness and sorrow, and in an agony, before he was condemned and fastened to the cross : but then all the pain and shame which he did undergo ! His death was violent and accursed, and, just before he breathed out his last, his Father hid his face, his sufferings were unconceivably increased by a dreadful desertion, which made him roar out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me ?” (Matt. xxvii. 46.)

When Christ died, the sins of the whole church were laid upon the Head of the church. How many stings then had the death of Christ ! “All we like sheep have gone astray ; we have turned every one to his own way : and the Lord hath laid upon him the iniquity of us all.” (Isai. liii. 6.) And if *all* were laid upon him, *none* shall be laid to the charge of them who believe in him. But how came it to pass that Christ did not sink under such a burden ? The first sin of the first man was enough to sink all the world into hell : how could Christ bear up under all the sins of so great a multitude ? The reason is, because he is God ; the blood of Christ is the blood of God. How loud does it cry for pardon and salvation, and how easily does it drown the cry of sin for vengeance ! The blood and sufferings of Christ, applied and relied on by faith, justify the sinner, silence Satan the accuser, purge the conscience from dead works, and open a way into the holiest of all. By the cross of Christ we are to climb up to the throne of glory. The more the death of Christ is studied, the spirit will be more contrite, the heart more clean, the conscience more calm and quiet. The death of Christ puts the sin to death, but delivers the sinner from it.

5. Growing in the knowledge of Christ implies *a more fruitful eyeing of his resurrection and going to his Father*.—Hark to the apostle : “That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable to his death, if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.” (Phil. iii. 10, 11.) The justice of God had Christ under an arrest, and had cast him into the grave as into a prison ; and if he had not fully paid the debt of those whose surety he became, it would have held him in prison to this hour. If Christ were not risen, faith would be vain, the guilt and power of sin would remain. But being risen, true believers are delivered from sin’s punishment and power : sin and death and Satan are triumphed over. Know that there is a very great

power and virtue to be derived from the resurrection of our Lord. (1.) A power to raise a drooping spirit. When Christ was risen, he sends this message to his disciples, that they might be well assured his God was theirs, his Father their Father: "Go to my brethren, and say to them, I ascend to my Father and your Father; and to my God and your God." (John xx. 17.) (2.) A power to spiritualize carnal affections. "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." (Col. iii. 1, 2.) (3.) Finally, a power to confirm and establish the soul in grace. For "Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him:" (Rom. vi. 9;) and they that are once really quickened by him, shall never more become "dead in sins and trespasses," but shall continue faithful to the death, and may confidently expect a joyful resurrection. Christ is risen as "the first-fruits of them that slept." (1 Cor. xv. 20.) Therefore there will be a harvest at the end of the world, when all the bodies of the saints that "were sown in corruption, shall be raised in incorruption; that were sown in dishonour, shall be raised in glory." (Verses 42, 43.)

6. Growing in the knowledge of Christ implies *greater satisfaction about his imputed righteousness*.—The apostle, having spoken of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, presently declares his desire to be "found in him, not having his own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." * (Phil. iii. 9.) This righteousness of Christ is called "the righteousness of God;" because it is that which God accepts, and upon the account of which he justifies the ungodly. Moreover, Christ himself is Jehovah, the true God; else his obedience and sufferings would not have been sufficient to have been our justifying righteousness. This righteousness is said to be imputed; and imputed by the Lord himself, and that without works;

* *Cur, insane sophista, asseris dilectionem, spem, et alias virtutes? Scio has esse insignia Dei dona divinitus mandata per Spiritum Sanctum in nostris cordibus excitari et alii. Scio fidem sine his donis non existere. Sed nunc nobis quæstio est quid cuiusque proprium sit. Tenes manu varia semina: non autem quero quæ cum quibus conjuncta sint, sed quæ cuiusque propria virtus. Hic apertè dic quid faciat sola fides, non cum quibus virtutibus sit conjuncta. Sola fides apprehendit promissionem, credit promittenti Deo, Deo porrigenti admovet manum, et accipit: hoc proprium solius fidei opus est. Charitas, spes, et patientia habent alias materias circa quas versantur, habent alios limites intra quos consistunt; non enim complectuntur promissionem, sed mandata exequuntur.*—LUTHERUS, tom. ii. in *Gen.* p. 57, a. "Why, insane sophister, dost thou assert the existence of love, hope, and other virtues? I am aware that these are signal gifts of God, which are divinely commanded to be excited and nourished in our hearts through the Holy Spirit. I know that without these gifts faith itself cannot subsist. But now comes this question to be discussed between us: 'What is the property of each of these gifts?' Thou holdest in thy hand various seeds: I do not ask thee how they are intermixed with each other, but what is the peculiar virtue of each. Now then plainly declare to me the achievements of faith alone, not the virtues with which it is conjoined. Faith alone apprehends the promise, yields credence to God who promises, reaches out its hands to God who proffers his benefits, and gladly accepts them: all this is the proper work of faith alone. There are other matters about which *love, hope, and patience* are severally concerned, and each of them has particular limits within which it is exercised: for it is not their province to embrace the promise, but to execute what is commanded."—EDIT.

and this doctrine was preached in the Old Testament by David, as well as in the New by the apostle Paul. (Rom. iv. 6.) Nay, as Christ is called "the Lord our Righteousness," (Jer. xxiii. 6,) so Jerusalem, the church, is called after her husband's name, "the Lord our Righteousness," (Jer. xxxiii. 16,) to show the reality of the imputation of this righteousness, and the real and blessed benefits that follow upon it. It is by this righteousness applied by faith, that we are justified from all our transgressions of the law, and from our sins against the gospel. That guilt which we have contracted by our impenitency and unbelief, which are sins against the gospel, can be removed out of God's sight only by the righteousness, by the blood and death, of his Son. All justification therefore before God, whether our sins have been against the first or the second covenant, is purely, merely by this righteousness of Jesus Christ: whereof faith is *medium applicationis*, "a means to apply." O the completeness and perfection of this righteousness of Christ! There is no need of any addition. He is called "the Sun of Righteousness;" (Mal. iv. 2;) and therefore, in the business of justification, all other righteousness should vanish, as the stars do at the sun-rising. Let Satan rage, let Rome deride and reproach; this article of imputed righteousness must stand, or the church will fall. And the better Christ is known, the more confidently shall we own his righteousness.

7. Growing in the knowledge of Christ implies *a more constant and fiducial eyeing of his intercession, and the pity and compassions of him that intercedes*.—Believers should better know this Friend and Advocate in the court of heaven, who always appears for them there. He presents to his Father what he did and suffered upon earth: and how effectual is this on the church's behalf! Though the Head be in heaven, yet he is mindful of his members on earth, and is ready to plead for them. Here is the ground of boldness in coming to the throne of grace; for "we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God. For we have not a High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." (Heb. iv. 14—16.) Here is the reason why the saints' prayers are so mighty and prevalent,—they are backed with the intercession of Christ. Nay, it is upon this that the apostle concludes believers' salvation to the uttermost: "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever lives to make intercession for them." (Heb. vii. 25.)

8. Growing in the knowledge of Christ implies *being better acquainted with his great power, and continual presence with his church which is so nearly related to him*.—Behold! "All power is given to him both in heaven and in earth." (Matt. xxviii. 18.) "At his name every knee does bow; and every tongue," if it will speak truth, must "confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." (Phil. ii. 10, 11.) He is "the blessed and only Potentate, the

King of kings, and Lord of lords." (1 Tim. vi. 15.) The mightiest monarchs are more under his power than their meanest slaves are under theirs. He has all the reprobate angels in a chain: the key of hell is in his hand, he commands all there. And in heaven the elect angels are his ministers to fulfil his pleasure. He is indeed exalted "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come." (Eph. i. 21.) Now this Lord, who is so powerful, has assured his church, which is his spouse, nay, his body, that "he will be with her always to the end of the world." (Matt. xxviii. 20.) The church therefore, in spite of earth and hell, shall last while the world lasts. Let fear give way, and faith increase. Believers may condemn their proudest adversaries. See Zion's carriage toward Sennacherib, the great king of Assyria: "The virgin, the daughter of Sion, hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee." (Isai. xxxvii. 22.)

9. Growing in the knowledge of Christ implies *a better understanding [of] him as "Mediator of the new covenant."*—So he is called, Heb. xii. 24. On this covenant, pardoning mercy, renewing grace, and eternal glory are promised. Earth and heaven, the creature and the Creator himself, by himself, are made over to believers. Now you must know that all their "promises are *Yea and Amen* in Christ." (2 Cor. i. 20.) The covenant was made for his sake: it was ratified and confirmed by his death: his blood is called "the blood of the everlasting covenant." (Heb. xiii. 20.) His blood being shed, the covenant stands good unto eternity. Here is vast encouragement to lay hold upon the promises. If you come to God, and ask: "Lord! hast thou not made promises of pardon to the penitent and believing? promises of grace to the humble? promises of satisfaction to the hungry souls? promises of joy and comfort to the mourners?" in his word, God answers, "*Yea.*" If you farther add: "Lord, let these promises be accomplished for thy Christ's sake;" the answer is, "*Amen*, it shall be so; they shall be all fulfilled."

10. Growing in the knowledge of Christ implies *a more earnest looking for his WORD appearing.*—The day of this appearing is appointed, it draws very near; being hastened by the prayers and sufferings of saints, by the sins and security of the world. "Yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry." (Heb. x. 37.) If Christ were better known, this day would be more longed-for by the saints. Innocency will then be cleared, all enemies more than conquered, salvation will be perfected, the whole church of Christ with all its members glorified. "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." (Col. iii. 4.) Thus you see what it is to grow in the knowledge of Christ; and the telling you this, is indeed a directing you how to grow in this knowledge.

II. In the second place I am to show you *what properties are required in this knowledge.*

1. This knowledge of Christ *should grow more and more certain.*—

The apostle speaks of "riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ." (Col. ii. 2.) The truths of Christ are certain in themselves. The mind should "understand" them as most certain; there should be "an assurance" of their certainty, a "full assurance" of it. Such an assurance is a rich thing, a thing of great value; for it will have a great virtue and efficacy both upon the heart and life.

2. This knowledge of Christ *should more and more humble the Christian*.—When he sees the treasures of wisdom in Christ, he should be sensible of his own folly. When he views the robe of Christ's righteousness, he should be sensible that his own righteousnesses are but rags. When he studies Christ's fulness and power, he should be sensible of his own emptiness and weakness. Finally, he should see himself to be nothing, when he perceives that "Christ is all, and in all." (Col. iii. 11.)

3. This knowledge of Christ *should grow more spiritual*.—He is not to be known after a carnal manner; and therefore Popish images are very unfit representations of him. Not that his flesh is swallowed up of his Divinity, as Servetus dreamed; but his flesh is glorified; and as transcendently glorious we must now look upon him. We must also know him as the purchaser and bestower of all spiritual gifts and graces, that we may be further renewed by his Spirit. The apostle is thus to be understood when he says: "Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." (2 Cor. v. 16, 17.)

4. This knowledge of Christ *should encourage to a more settled reliance upon him*.—When we see what a sure and everlasting foundation Christ is, here we should build higher and higher till the top reach heaven: there is no fear that the foundation will not bear the superstructure. We may safely depend upon Christ for a lasting peace with God, for perfecting the work of grace, and abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom. "He that believeth on him shall never be confounded." (1 Peter ii. 6.) Let not this reliance be called "a lolling faith;" but, without scoffing at her, let the church of Christ be permitted to "lean upon her Beloved," while she is so weak as she is in the wilderness of this world. (Canticles viii. 5.)

5. The knowledge of Christ *should raise him higher and higher in Christians' estimation*.—The more we know of him, new beauties will still be discovered in him. He is "greater than Jonas" a prophet, "greater than Solomon" a king, who was the most famous king of Israel. (Matt. xii. 41, 42.) "He is altogether lovely;" (Canticles v. 16;) nay, he is the angels' wonder, heaven's darling, "the brightness of his Father's glory." Here is no danger of an overvalue, of an excessive love. Therefore let the spark be blown up into a flame that may "not be quenched by many floods of water," that may be too strong for death and hell itself to conquer. (Canticles viii. 6, 7.)

6. The knowledge of Christ *should have a great aspect upon whatever else is revealed in the word of God*.—It is a great matter to know

"the truth as it is in Jesus." (Eph. iv. 21.) The apostle tells us, that he desired to know nothing else but "Jesus Christ and him crucified;" (1 Cor. ii. 2;) which plainly intimates that he looked upon other things with a respect unto Christ: and, indeed, without such a respect, what knowledge can be profitable, what knowledge can be comfortable? Luther said, *In Christo crucifixo est vera theologia, et cognitio Dei*: "There cannot be a right knowledge of God, if there be an ignorance of Christ crucified."

7. The knowledge of Christ,—it *should be operative still in a greater measure*.—It is inexcusable to be slothful, where the Master is so good, the promised assistance so great, the commands far from grievous, and the reward eternal. The better we know our Lord Jesus, we shall serve him with a more perfect heart, with a more willing mind. Obedience is reasonable, pleasant, necessary. We should be steadfast, and always abound herein. Labour shall not be in vain. (1 Cor. xv. 58.)

8. The knowledge of Christ *should cause great glorying and joy*.—Well may believers, who "have no confidence in the flesh," who "worship God in the spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus." (Phil. iii. 3.) God in Christ is become their Father, and he will not disinherit any of his children whom he has adopted, but they shall abide in the house for ever. Nothing shall separate them from his love. (Rom. viii. 35—39.) The marriage-union between Christ and them shall never be dissolved. Mansions are preparing for them in heaven, where there is everlasting light and pleasantness; and they are fitting for these mansions, and shall not be long out of them. (John xiv. 2, 3.) Well may they love their Lord, and, "believing, rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." (1 Peter i. 8.)

III. In the third place, the DIRECTIONS follow, *how you may increase and grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ*. The directions are these:—

1. *Be sensible of your remaining ignorance*.—And how great the hinderance is, how great the harm is, that is the effect of it. You that are "the children of light and of the day" have much of night and darkness in you. A perfect day you cannot indeed expect in this world. But then it is possible that your darkness may be much more dispelled; and it is your fault, if it be not. So far as darkness remains, the prince of darkness has power, the world has an advantage; and there is danger of being reduced * to the works of darkness. The want of greater light is the cause of doubts and fears, disconsolateness and confusion. How little do you know of Christ in comparison of what you ought or might! Are you got beyond the surface of gospel-mysteries? how far from searching into the heart of them, and discerning the depths of wisdom, the height of love, in them? Hence it is, that your admiration and affection are no greater. You are engaged in a warfare. It is dangerous fighting in the dark, especially with an enemy that fights best there. You are travelling in

* In the Latin signification of "brought back," very usual among our old writers.—EDIT.

a very narrow way: the less of light is in you, you will find it the more difficult to keep this way. For shame! Be not babes in knowledge, "but in understanding be ye men." (1 Cor. xiv. 20.) Let it very much humble you to consider the small progress [which] you have made in knowledge, notwithstanding the great advantages you have had of improvement.

2. *Compare all other knowledge and this knowledge of Christ together, and see the vast difference in point of excellency.*—And this will stir you up to grow therein. The philosophers of old,—how restless were their minds, how endless their inquiries! The farther they went, the more they were puzzled; and, after long study, they came to understand that they fully understood nothing. That wise king of Israel, after he had diligently employed his large understanding about human knowledge—he cries out, as a man exceedingly vexed and disappointed: "In much wisdom there is much grief: and he that increases knowledge increases sorrow." (Eccles. i. 18.) But the knowledge of Christ is of another nature. He that rightly understands the Lord Jesus, understands how to have his guilt removed, his heart renewed, his conscience calmed, his soul secured, and that for ever. This knowledge is not a vexation, but a satisfaction, to the spirit; both because of its certainty, and because of the superabundant grace and fulness in Christ who is known. Here it may truly be said, *Intellectus est in quiete*: * "The better Christ is understood, the more the soul that understands him is at rest."

3. *You must not lean to your own parts and understandings.*—Men of the greatest natural capacities have been men of the greatest mistakes and the foulest errors; and herein† they have embraced for the truths of Christ: and the reason is, because, their hearts being proud, God thwarted them, and their pride blinded them. In your ordinary, secular affairs, it is not safe to confide in your own wisdom; but even here you are to acknowledge God. Certainly then, when searching into the mysteries of the gospel, you must be sensible that the sharpest understanding has need of illumination from above. You must indeed "be fools, that you may be wise." (1 Cor. iii. 18.) A sight of your folly and weakness must make and keep you very humble. Such the Lord has promised to "guide in judgment, and to teach his way." (Psalm xxv. 9.)

4. *Heedfully attend to the word of the truth of the gospel.*—This is the great means to infuse and to increase the knowledge of Christ. It is called "the word of Christ:" "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom;" (Col. iii. 16;) because Christ is the author of it, and the principal subject therein treated of. The gospel informs you of his natures, divine and human; of his offices, prophetic, priestly, kingly; of his benefits, justification, adoption, regeneration, strong consolation, and such-like. The gospel informs you what he did, what he suffered, and how he eyed his church's

* "Here the understanding is at rest." The translation in the text is, like many others, an ingenious play upon this phrase.—EDIT. † This is an evident misprint for "these," or some other word, similar in signification.—EDIT.

good in both. It informs you where Christ is *gloriously* present,—in the highest heavens; where he is *graciously* present,—he “walks in the midst of the golden candlesticks,” (Rev. ii. 1,) and accompanies his own institutions with a mighty and gracious efficacy. O study this gospel more! take it in at *your eyes*, by reading it; at *your ears*, by hearing it; nay, receive it into *your very hearts*. The gospel is that which brings you to the knowledge of Christ, and so “makes you wise unto salvation.”* (2 Tim. iii. 15.)

5. *Look unto Jesus himself.*—For “in Him are hid all treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” (Col. ii. 3.) The sun is seen by its own light; the knowledge of Christ is derived from himself. He is the greatest and best of prophets: who teacheth like him? He not only reveals the things of peace, but also gives the power of spiritual discerning. It is from him that we have the “eye-salve to make us see;” (Rev. iii. 18;) and the more [we have] of this eye-salve, we see the clearer. What kind of master would that be that were well skilled in all sorts of learning, and were able also to give parts and capacities to all his scholars, that they might be all excellent? Christ is such a master as can give subtlety to the simple, and reveal those things to babes, which are above the wise and prudent of the world. It is said of Jesus, that “he opened the disciples’ understandings, that they might understand the scriptures.” (Luke xxiv. 45.) There was good reason why the apostle should wish that “the Lord Jesus might be with Timothy’s spirit;” (2 Tim. iv. 22;) that he might be better instructed, and that he might be a better instructor.

6. *Cry for more knowledge, and eye the promise of the Spirit of wisdom and revelation.*—The Psalmist, who was “wiser than his enemies,” that “understood more than his teachers,” that had “greater understanding than the ancients;” (Psalm cxix. 98—100;)—how often and how earnestly does he cry to be taught of God! “Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end. Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart.” (Verses 33, 34.) He that has the greatest measure of knowledge, has reason to beg for more. And that which is an encouragement to prayer, is the readiness of “the Father of lights” to give wisdom liberally, without upbraiding; (James i. 5, 17;) and likewise the promise [which] he has made of his Spirit; who is styled by the apostle, Πνεῦμα σοφίας καὶ ἀποκαλύψεως, “the Spirit of wisdom and revelation.” (Eph. i.

* *Conarer in animos summā vi inserere, infigere, infundere amorem: amorem autem? Imò verò ardorem potius literarum verè sacrarum. Conarer ad legendum illis exstimulare, ad perscrutandum animare, ad meditandum, nocturnā versandum manu, versandum diurnā; ad insensendum, ad immoriendum denique, quantū maxīmā possem vehementiā inflammare.*—MARTINUS DORPIUS *De Laudibus Pauli*, p. 6. “I would endeavour with all my might to introduce, infix, and force into their minds a love for that learning which is truly sacred. But why do I call it merely a love? I would attempt to infuse into them an irrepressible ardour. I would stimulate them to read; animate them deeply to search, to meditate, and to engage themselves, both by night and by day, in this delightful exercise. Nay, with the utmost vehemence of which I am capable, I would strive to inflame them with a determination to devote their latest hours to these holy studies, and even to be so intent upon them as to disregard life itself.”—EDIT.

17.) "The Spirit searcheth all things, even the deep things of God;" these are the truths of Christ in the gospel, and the Spirit reveals them; which also "could never have entered into the heart of men." (1 Cor. ii. 9, 10.) Lay hold of the promise of the Spirit, which the Father is more forward to give than earthly parents bread to their hungry children. (Luke xi. 13.) Take heed of grieving this Holy Spirit; (Eph. iv. 30;) deliver up yourselves to his guidance, and "hear what he saith unto the churches;" (Rev. ii. 7;) and he will "lead you" farther "into all truth," and "glorify Christ," (John xvi. 13, 14,) by causing you to see more of his beauty, more of his glory.

7. *Take heed of seducing spirits.*—Hearken to the apostle John: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God;" (1 John iv. 1;) and the trial is to be made with reference to Christ. (Verse 2.) It is much to be observed, that Satan, the father of lies, in broaching of heresies has struck at our Lord Jesus in a special manner. Arius of old denied his Godhead; Eutyches, his manhood. Nestorius denied the union of his nature in one person; Pelagius opposed his grace; and antichrist would fain banish his gospel, and hinder him from being looked unto as "the only Mediator." (1 Tim. ii. 5.) You that are the sheep of Christ, hearken not to the voice of such strangers, but flee from them. (John x. 5.) Be not like "children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine," as you would become "perfect men in the knowledge of the Son of God," and attain to "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." (Eph. iv. 13, 14.)

8. *Abstain from worldly and fleshly lusts.*—These put out the soul's eye, and take away the heart. These lusts are called "deceitful and foolish lusts," for they make mere fools of those that make provision to fulfil them. The cleaner your hearts are from pride, envy, passion, malice, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, the clearer will the eyes of your understandings be to see the Lord Jesus. The apostle bids the Ephesians to "put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts:" and then adds, "Be ye renewed in the spirit of your mind." (Eph. iv. 22, 23.) So, Col. iii. 5, 10: "Mortify your members which are upon earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection," &c.; and then it follows, "Put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge, after the image of him that created him."

9. *Associate yourselves with them who have a great measure of the knowledge of Christ.*—Solomon tells us, "He that walketh with the wise shall be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed." (Prov. xiii. 20.) Value the communion of saints, and delight in them as the most excellent company; and like them best when they show the best of themselves, and most of all manifest that light and heat that is in them. O what an improvement might saints make one of another, as to wisdom, grace, and consolation, if they were not wanting one to another and to themselves also! The weaker Christians should learn of the stronger, especially of their teachers;

and teachers themselves, by imparting light to others, would find their own light increased; knowledge being like the widow's oil, which, the more it was drawn out, the more it was augmented.*

10. *Let your end in desiring a greater degree of the knowledge of Christ be right.*—Not that you may be puffed-up in your own minds, or admired by men, but that Christ may be more admired and esteemed by you. “If knowledge puffs you up, you are not really great and grown, but only swelled and diseased,” as a father observes, *Superbia non est magnitudo sed tumor*.† More talents will be committed to your trust, if you ask more, that you may improve them. Let this be your design in desiring to grow in the knowledge of Christ,—that your faith may grow exceedingly, that your love may grow more ardent, and that “over all things” in your hearts “Christ may have the pre-eminence.” (Col. i. 18.) Long to know him better, that this knowledge may more perfectly cleanse both your hearts and conversations. “Follow on to know him,” (Hosea vi. 3,) that you may follow harder after him.

IV. In the fourth and last place, I am to tell you *what use and improvement you are to make of this knowledge of Christ, or of Christ known.*

1. And here I might speak largely, first of all, to *them that are without Christ*.—You that are in this state must needs be also “without hope, and without God in the world.” (Eph. ii. 12.) You that are such, pray consider what you have heard concerning the Lord Jesus; and seriously weigh with yourselves, whether you have reason still to slight him. Much good has been told you concerning him; and none but a lying spirit can suggest, and a foolish heart believe, that it is best still to keep at a distance from him. Christ calls after you to this day, though you have long rejected him. “Behold, he stands at the door and knocks,” (Rev. iii. 20,) waiting that he may be gracious. O that at length you would be prevailed-with to come to him! I shall only use these two arguments to persuade you:—

(1.) *Christ is willing to receive the very worst of you, upon your returning and believing.*—He will take you with all your faults, and obtain your full and free pardon. He will take you with all your debts, and cross your scores, cancel your bonds, though your debts amount to many thousand talents. He will take you with all your infirmities, though never so foul and loathsome; and heal and cleanse your souls by his blood and Spirit. The apostle Paul speaks of his being “apprehended of Christ Jesus:” (Phil. iii. 12:) and when our Lord Jesus apprehended him and graciously received him, whom did

* *Ego ex eorum numero me esse profiteor, qui scribunt proficiendo, et scribendo proficiunt.*—AUGUSTINI *Epist.* 7. “I profess myself to be in the number of those who write for profit and improvement, and who are both profited and improved by writing.”—EDIT.

† *Apparet Christus humilis ad superbos. Est enim superbia non magnitudo sed tumor: quod autem tumor videtur magnum, sed non est sanum.*—AUGUSTINUS *De Temp.* *Serm.* 27. “In the eyes of the proud, Christ appears mean and lowly. For pride is not itself of any real magnitude, but a little thing which swells and tumefies itself. That which is thus puffed up seems to be great; but it is only inflated, hollow, and unsound.”—EDIT.

he receive? It was "a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious:" and yet he "obtained mercy." (1 Tim. i. 13.) If the apostle had ransacked all, he could hardly have found a worse crew, than those mentioned, 1 Cor. vi. 9—11: "Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, abusers of themselves with mankind, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners:" and yet these were "washed and sanctified" first, and saved afterwards. Here is a strong inducement to the very worst to come to this gracious, this mighty Saviour.

(2.) *Christ is willing to give himself to you:*—So that all that he is and has shall be yours. You are not only called, but wooed; you are solicited to give your consent to a marriage; and this is the greatest and the best match of all,—to be married to "the Prince of life" and "Lord of all." Be but willing to be his, he is much more willing to be yours. O wonder at his condescending love! wonder at your own madness in standing out! and presently yield yourselves to Jesus, saying, "Lord, we repent, we believe! help thou our unbelief, and heal the impenitency and hardness of our hearts!"

2. I shall say no more at present to the unbelievers, but *address myself to you that are saints, who have known Christ with a saving knowledge*; and shall show you how Christ and the knowledge of him may be used and improved.

(1.) *Improve the knowledge of Christ with reference to God himself.*—God out of Christ is very dreadful; thus considered, sinful man must look upon him as the devils do, "and tremble." (James ii. 19.) He has fury in his face, curses in his mouth, and a glittering sword in his hand; and what flesh can stand before him? But you that are believers are to look upon him as he is in Christ. Now his wrath is taken away, he is the God of love and peace, and grace and comfort. You may discern his bowels yearning toward you, his everlasting arm embracing you. His language is most sweet and full of kindness; nay, he swears he will bless you with all sorts of blessings, but especially with the best, namely, spiritual and everlasting. Under the Old Testament God was called "the Lord that brought Israel out of Egypt;" afterwards, "the Lord that brought Judah out of the land of the north." (Jer. xvi. 14, 15.) But under the New Testament, he is styled again, "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Eph. i. 3; 1 Peter i. 3.) Behold him in Christ, and you will see him to be a Father, a Guide, a Shield, an exceeding great Reward. You may abound in faith, and hope, and joy in the Lord; for he is the God of your salvation.

(2.) *Improve the knowledge of Christ with reference to the law of God.*—The law, considered in itself, since the fall of man, is the ministration of death. It condemns the transgressors, and concludes and leaves them under wrath; and it is so weak through the flesh, that it can give righteousness and life to none. But if this law be looked upon in the hand of Christ the Mediator, its curse is removed, its rigour abated. The believer may "delight in the law of God," (Psalm i. 2,) and prefer it before "thousands of gold and silver;" (Psalm cxix. 72;) and is to account it one of the choice new-covenant blessings,

to have this law written in his very heart. (Heb. viii. 10.) Christ heals the natural enmity against the law of God, which was in the hearts of believers; and strengthens them to yield obedience to it; and that promise is fulfilled: "I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." (Ezek. xxxvi. 27.)

(3.) *Improve the knowledge of Christ with reference to sin.*—Behold the Lord Jesus, "for sin condemning sin in the flesh;" (Rom. viii. 3;) that is, by being made a sin-offering, he condemned sin. Sin's cause falls; sin is, as it were, cast; and the sinner, believing in Jesus, is acquitted. If you are in Christ, sin,—though it has damned thousands, yet you are freed from its condemning power. "There is therefore no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." (Rom. viii. 1.) Behold this Lamb of God, who bare your sins himself, a load too heavy for you to bear! Are you afflicted with the remainders of lusts and corruptions? still look to Jesus. No lust so strong but he can easily mortify it. The death of Christ has a killing power in reference to sin; without this all means of mortification will be of little efficacy. The apostle speaks of *συμφυτοι γεγοναμεν τῷ ὁμοιωματί του θανατου*, being "planted together in the likeness of his death." (Rom. vi. 5.) As the branch derives virtue from the vine, so the Christian mortifying power from Christ's death. When he, the Second Adam, was crucified, the old Adam was crucified with him; and truly the old man with his lusts and deeds must be mortified, by the improvement of Christ's crucifixion. "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." (Rom. vi. 6.)

(4.) *Improve the knowledge of Christ in reference to angels, and that both good and evil angels.*—The good ones have Christ to be their head; (Col. ii. 10;) and they, holding this Head, are confirmed and established. These good angels are said to ascend and descend upon Christ; (John i. 51;) which Luther refers to their contemplation of Christ's divinity and humanity: *Videre, in eodem personâ, summa et infima conjunctissima*.^{*} But Calvin refers it to the angels' ministrations.† Here is an allusion to Jacob's ladder. Christ is that ladder whereby we may ascend. It is through Him that heaven is open; and it is upon his account that the angels are ready to do offices of kindness to believers, and are so ready to be "ministering spirits, to

^{*} "They behold the very highest and lowest things strangely conjoined in the same person."—EDIT.

† *Hoc beneficium Christo acceptum ferre convenit, quia sine ipso hostile potius angelis nobiscum discidium est quàm familiaris juvandi nostri cura. Idò super ipsum ascendere et descendere dicuntur, non quòd illi soli ministrent: sed quòd ejus respectu et in ejus honorem complectantur suâ curâ totum Ecclesiæ corpus.*—CALVINUS in Johan. cap. i. "It was proper to render this grateful service to Christ, as an honour due to him; because without him the separation subsisting between us and the angels would have assumed a hostile character rather than that of a familiar and kind solicitude to afford us needful assistance. They are therefore said to ascend and descend upon the Son of man, not because they minister solely to him, but because, in reference to him and for his honour, they embrace in their care the entire body of the church of Christ."—EDIT.

minister for them that are heirs of salvation." (Heb. i. 14.) And as from Christ you are to expect care from the good angels, so he can easily defend you from the bad ones. He stops the mouth of the devil, who is "the accuser of the brethren," by that full satisfaction which he has made to Divine Justice. He detects him as a liar, and discovers his wiles and devices. He opposes Satan as a murderer, and hinders him from devouring the least lamb of his flock. He is ready to arm you with the whole armour of God, and strengthens you both to combat and to conquer. He has tried Satan's strength in his own person, and has got the victory. "He has spoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them." (Col. ii. 15.)

(5.) *Improve the knowledge of Christ with reference to this present world.*—Christ in the days of his flesh had little of the world, and in the hour of temptation he despised the offer of the whole. Surely, it is a thing of small value, and it usually proves a great snare; else Christians should have more of it. "They are enemies to the cross of Christ, who mind earthly things." (Phil. iii. 18, 19.) They are strangers to "the power of his resurrection," whose hearts and treasure are not in heaven. Look unto Jesus, and look off from the world, or look upon it with contempt. Be not so eager after that which Christ lost his life to deliver you from. "He gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father." (Gal. i. 4.)

(6.) *Improve this knowledge of Christ with reference to duties, grace, and perseverance in grace.*—Let all your duties "be done in his name;" (Col. iii. 17;) that is, in his strength; and with expectation of acceptance entirely upon the account of his mediation. Apply yourselves to him for "grace to help in every time of need;" (Heb. iv. 16;) for grace to do, for grace to suffer, for grace to persevere, and "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God." (Col. iv. 12.)

The believer in Christ, notwithstanding all weaknesses and remainders of indwelling sin, is much safer than innocent Adam in Paradise; because Christ has engaged for believers, that they shall endure to the end; and that he will "give them eternal life," and "none shall pluck them out of his hand, and the hand of his Father." (John x. 28, 29.) In such hands they must needs be safe indeed.

(7.) *Improve this knowledge of Christ with reference to comfort.*—It is He that sends the Comforter who abides with the church for ever. (John xiv. 16.) The church and the church's comfort are built upon the same rock, Christ. Your consolation then will be strong, if you "fly for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before you." (Heb. vi. 18.) You that are saints, well may you rejoice in Christ Jesus, since by him you have received the atonement. Peace he has left you for a legacy, a peace that will abide in the midst of the greatest outward troubles, a comfort that most abounds when sufferings are most abundant. (2 Cor. i. 5.) Consider the Lord Jesus, and be filled with "everlasting consolation and good hope through grace." (2 Thess. ii. 16.) How strong is his hand, how tender his heart, how un-

changeable his kindness! "Jesus is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." (Heb. xiii. 8.)

(8.) *Improve the knowledge of Christ with reference to his church's enemies.*—He is above their match, and he will make them know it. They cannot hide their counsels from Him "who searcheth the reins and hearts." (Rev. ii. 23.) And they must needs at last be disappointed and worsted, for Christ will reign "till all his foes be made his footstool." (Heb. x. 13.) Julian the emperor wanted neither policy, nor valour, nor an armed power; and yet of a sudden he had a deadly wound given him; and cries out, *Vicisti, Galilæe!* "O Galilean!" so he called Christ, "thou hast overcome me!" This will be the end of the stoutest and proudest of the church's adversaries. Christians are as dear to Christ as "the apple of his eye." They are bold fellows that will venture to give Christ a blow on his very eye; this affront will not be borne long, and what a deadly stroke will this Judge of the world at last return!

(9.) *Improve the knowledge of Christ with reference to death.*—He has grappled with death, and has been too hard for it.* He has taken away its sting, which was the worst thing in it; and is ready to "deliver from that bondage" which "the fear of death" causes. (Heb. ii. 15.) The apostle, having eyed Christ and the resurrection, insults over this last enemy: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" (1 Cor. xv. 55.) Christ has sanctified the grave into a bed of rest; and, to use Luther's expression, *Mors est janua vitæ*, "Death is the gate to life and immortality." The dying Christian, when he lifts up his eyes to his Lord and Saviour,—he may say then with Laurentius, *Nox mea tenebras non habet*, "The night of death hath no darkness in it," but is an entrance into the light that is everlasting.

(10.) *Improve the knowledge of Christ with reference to eternity.*—So vast and endless a thing may well be of an amazing consideration; and when once in eternity, there is no correcting of mistakes. Look therefore unto Jesus to search and prove you; and to keep you sincere and without offence unto the last. And when time is just come to an end, behold your Lord entered into everlasting joy himself, and ready to receive you into the same. Christ is gone already, as "your forerunner," (Heb. vi. 20,) nay, as your representative, and has taken possession of the incorruptible and undefiled inheritance. Do you gladly follow him, as knowing that when your "earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, you have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." (2 Cor. v. 1.)

* *Mirabili modo fit dum mors Christum devorat devoratur, dum occidit occiditur, dum vincit vincitur.*—LUTHER, tom. iv. p. 679. "By a process worthy of our highest admiration, it has been wisely ordered, that while Death is in the act of devouring Christ, he is himself devoured; while slaying another, he is himself slain; and before he can boast of his conquest, he is completely conquered."—EDIT.