

# CASUISTICAL MORNING EXERCISES.

## SERMON I.

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HOW MAY WE GIVE CHRIST A SATISFYING ACCOUNT, WHY WE ATTEND UPON THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD?

*But what went ye out for to see?—Matthew xi. 9.*

COULD I preface this Exercise with any thing, which, through grace, would force its own application, and lie lieger\* in your consciences, to mingle with every sermon you shall hear; that these sermons may influence your lives, so that your profiting (though you modestly veil it, yet) may shine through the veil, and may appear unto all men, so as to commend religion in them who are prejudiced against it, and to encourage those who have made some entrance into it; then you and I, when we shall meet in glory, shall bless God for this Exercise.

Shall we try, Christians, what may be done? Conscience, do thine office! and, through God's assistance, I will endeavour to do mine.

John Baptist was bodily in prison, spiritually in heaven. He is not solicitous about himself, but his disciples, and therefore sends them to Christ; as a dying father consigns his children to a faithful tutor, and then dies quietly: he had instructed them while he could, and now recommends them to Christ. When John's disciples were gone, Christ asked the people, who used to flock after John's ministry while he flourished, but now grew cold upon his long imprisonment;—Christ asks them what end they proposed to themselves. "What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?" As if he had said, "You could not look upon John to be a light, hollow, empty preacher, to bend with every wind and wave." "But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment?"—As if he had said, "You could not expect any thing smooth and delicate. John was no court-preacher; if he had, he would not be so long in prison, and now in daily danger of his life." These two metaphors show what John was not like. My text lies in the question, which is not negative, but affirmative. They looked upon him as a prophet, an extraordinary person sent from God:

\* "Remain as God's ambassador in your consciences."—EDIT.

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“Yea,” saith Christ, “and more than a prophet;” that is, John spake of Christ in another manner than the former prophets: they spake of him as a great way off, John points to him as present: “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” (John i. 29.) I know, some give quite another sense of the words, which I will not so much as mention, but presently propose what I take to be the sum of the text.

#### DOCTRINE.

*We should strictly and frequently call ourselves to an account, that we may the better give an answer to Christ's question, what end we propose to ourselves in attending upon the ministry of the word.*

It was but a little while since there was a general flocking after John Baptist, as if they would turn the city into a wilderness, and make the wilderness the city. “He was a burning and a shining light: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light;” (John v. 35;) but that flash is over, and now they are flocking after Christ with like affection. Christ doth as it were say to them, “It is a foolish and ridiculous lightness to run after the best preachers in the world, without proposing some end unto ourselves beyond the vanity and pomp of the world, some fruit that may remain.” The blessed apostle would have those that had been his hearers to call themselves to an account; “examine” themselves; (2 Cor. xiii. 5;) put such searching questions to their own consciences,—whether they be “in the faith;” whether the doctrine of faith hold them, that they do not swerve from it; and whether the grace of faith be in them, that they live by it? If not, they cannot expect that Christ should approve of them.

I shall endeavour to make my way to the stating of the case, through the explaining of the doctrine by these

#### PROPOSITIONS.

**PROPOSITION I.** *John Baptist's ministry was the best in the world, when he began to preach; and all people that had any care of their souls went out after him.*—His ministry differed from the ordinary ministry of the times. He cried not up human inventions before divine institutions; but with holy vehemency pressed the necessary doctrine of repentance; a repentance upon which they might expect pardon of sin: (Luke iii. 3:) and it was convincing where it was not converting, [in] those that loved their sins better than to yield. It was of Divine Authority, yet they loved their credit better than to affirm it was but of human authority. (Mark xi. 28—32.) In short: his main design was to bring or send persons to Christ. “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: whose fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” (Matt. iii. 11, 12.) As if he had said, “Christ will baptize

with the pouring-out of his Spirit on believers, and with that fiery trial which shall refine the gold from the dross, and winnow the wheat from the chaff: he will gather the faithful into his heavenly kingdom, and burn up unbelievers with unquenchable fire."

PROP. II. *Persons of all ranks, with some kind of pains and self-denial, followed John Baptist for his convincing instruction.* (Matt. iii. 5.)—Some were savingly converted, and got that good by his ministry which they made good use of many a year after: it is said of Apollos, that he knew "only the baptism of John." "He taught diligently the things of the Lord;" and with the help of what he got by Christian conference, "he mightily convinced the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah." (Acts xviii. 25—28.) But, beside few such,

1. *The Pharisees*: they followed him who were themselves the most applauded preachers among the Jews, they whose dictates were taken for oracles; they left the chair of Moses to hear this Elias.

2. *The Sadducees*: who denied the resurrection, and the immortality of the soul. John asks them, "Who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (Matt. iii. 7, 8.) As if he had said, "You Pharisees are so conceited of your own righteousness, that you think you are in no danger of hell; and you Sadducees think there is none." John presses both to repentance, that might evidence itself by its fruit to be sincere.

3. *Persons that pretended nothing to religion*, but were so infamous for gross wickedness that every one who valued his reputation shunned being seen in their company. "The publicans and the harlots" got heaven by believing. (Matt. xxi. 31, 32.)

4. *Soldiers*: that the Romans kept to maintain their conquest of Judea. Such do not use to trouble themselves with cases of conscience. "The soldiers also demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do?" (Luke iii. 14.) He doth not blame the employment, but regulates their behaviour.

5. *Courtiers*: who could not bear plain dealing, yet could expect no other from him. They could not but fear him, though they did not love him. It is said that Herod himself "feared John, knowing that he was a just man and a holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly." (Mark vi. 20.) As if he would bribe his conscience by parting with some sins more quietly, to give him leave to keep others, that he could not part with.

And thus you see what a congregation John preached to.

PROP. III. *Those that attend upon the ministry of the word,—they do or should propose unto themselves some end why they do it.*—Those who through grace propose a good end to themselves,—they always obtain their end; they who receive the truth in the love of it, shall be saved; (2 Thess. ii. 10;) but for the most,

1. *Some propose to themselves no end at all.*—Neither can they so much as speak sense to any one that shall ask them why they come there. I cannot better express it, than in the words of the divine historian, in describing of that rout, truly so called, though he names

176 SERMON I. HOW TO GIVE CHRIST A SATISFYING ACCOUNT, it "a church:" Ἡ ἐκκλησία συγκεχυμένη. "The assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together." (Acts xix. 32.) I am loath to say, this description fits too many congregations.

2. *Some propose to themselves ends downright sinful.*—Namely, some, to catch at expressions, for the exercise of their frothy wits over a glass of wine. "Be ye not mockers, lest your bands be made too strong" for you to break. (Isai. xxviii. 22.) Some, to ensnare the minister; we need not think it strange, for they dealt so with our Master: "They send unto him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians, to catch him in his words;" and they pretend a scrupulous conscience: they say unto him, "Master, we know that thou art true, and carest for no man: for thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth: is it lawful to give" that as "tribute to Cæsar," which Moses appointed for the use of the sanctuary? (Mark xii. 13, 14.) Christ doth as it were answer them, [that] if it were really a case of conscience, they would not stick at paying both; the one *because they must*, the other, *because they ought*. Some get into the greatest crowd for the advancement of their diving trade of picking pockets; they not at all observing how the devil tricks them of their souls for perverting the ends of the gospel.

3. *Some propose ends frivolous and trifling, though they are sinful too.*—For instance: some, to see fashions; some, to be taken notice of among serious Christians, for worldly, not spiritual, advantage.

PROP. IV. *Those that propose a good end, must call themselves to a strict and severe account, how that end is obtained or lost.*—A slight account is in some respect worse than none at all; for by a shuffling account you do but as it were bribe God's officer (natural conscience) to respite you from time to time, till death surpriseth you with a summons to give up your account to Christ himself.

I will name four metaphors which will illustrate and prove this:

1. We must give such an account *as a scholar to his teacher, of what he learns.*—"And he said unto them, Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?" (Mark iv. 13.) As if he had said, "If you understand not those similitudes that most plainly show you how you must receive the word if ever you get saving benefit by it, how will you ever profit by any thing else?"

2. You must give an account *as a steward to his master.*—"Give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward." (Luke xvi. 2.) But here is the difference between being stewards to *our heavenly* and to *an earthly* master: Christ and his servants have but one and the same interest; if we improve whatever he intrust us with for our real profit, we do thereby give him the glory [which] he expects, and he will accept of our accounts.

3. We must give an account *as a debtor to our creditor.*—"The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a certain king which would take account of his debtors. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him which owed him ten thousand talents," &c. (Matt. xviii. 23, 24.) We are so far sinfully indebted to the justice of God,

that unless we be discharged upon our Surety's payment, we must be imprisoned with devils unto eternity.

4. We must give an account *as a malefactor to a judge*.—"Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." (Matt. xii. 36, 37.) Unprofitable words cannot escape being accounted for. Let us fulfil all these metaphors in calling ourselves to account; and when we have done that, we have not done all; for,

PROP. V. *The strict account we take of ourselves must be frequent*.—Every Christian is Christ's garden, that "drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it." (Heb. vi. 7.) As there must be frequent showers on God's part, so there must be frequent weeding on our part, or no blessing to be expected. This is not a duty that can be dispatched at once; those that do not often account, never account as they ought. Methinks I may allude unto the dying words of Elisha to Joash, when he bid the king "smite upon the ground," without prescribing how oft; but when he smote only "thrice, the man of God was wroth with him," and told him he should have smitten oftener. (2 Kings xiii. 18, 19.) What, do you reflect upon yourselves only upon some qualm of conscience, or upon some rousing sermon, or upon some startling providence? Do not you know that your hearts are incredibly deceitful, Satan perpetually watchful to steal away the word? And he will do it unless you hide it in your heart. (Psalm cxix. 11.) Your ordinary experience tells you, that you never let your accounts run on to any length but they are entangled; and that your frequent self-reflections are always blessed with growth of grace.

But I will come to some INFERENCES from the doctrine.

INFERENCES.

INFERENCE I. *It is not the bare hearing of the best preachers in the world that will save you*.—Though a minister be never so successful in the conversion of sinners, unless your souls be converted, you had better never have heard him. Let not any scoffing atheist say, "Then I will never hear any of them more." Sirs, pray believe this one word,—*That will not make your damnation more tolerable*. "That which cometh into your mind shall not be at all: 'We will be as the Heathen, as the families of the countries, to serve wood and stone.' As I live, saith the Lord God, surely with a mighty hand, and with a stretched-out arm, and with fury poured out, will I rule over you." (Ezek. xx. 32, 33.) God will not send his word to a people, and leave them at their liberty to continue in their infidelity, or to return to it at their pleasure: if they will live as Heathens, their condemnation shall be far worse.

INFER. II. *Many persons, who lay aside other business, spend much time and take much pains to hear the best preachers: but they either not proposing or not pursuing a right end, renders all they do worse than nothing; and they drop into hell, while they seem to be*

*knocking at heaven-door.*—We read of “five thousand men, beside women and children.” (May we not moderately reckon the women and children to double the number?) These poor people, when they came from home, took provision with them for several days, drank water, lay several nights upon the ground in the open fields, stayed after their victuals were spent, till they were scarce able to get home for faintness. All this appears by having baskets so ready to gather up the fragments; whereas in the wilderness there was none to be bought or borrowed. (Matt. xiv. 15, &c.; xv. 32, &c.) But, alas! how few of this ten thousand were then savingly converted! We read not of any great numbers of converts by Christ’s preaching; for Christ but covertly and sparingly discovered himself to be the Messiah, lest he should hinder the main thing [which] he came into the world for, namely, to die for sinners; for “had they known him, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” (1 Cor. ii. 8.) Besides, Christ told his disciples, their preaching should be followed with the conversion of more souls than his. (John xiv. 12.) Pause a little, and think, how many will tell Christ they have heard him preach in their streets, and they have followed him into the wilderness; they have there wanted their sleep in the night, and gone with a hungry belly in the day, for which Christ fed them by miracle; and yet Christ “will profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” (Matt. vii. 23; Luke xiii. 26, 27.)

Let me follow these inferences with a word or two of

#### REPROOF.

1. *Of those whose other duties do not hold proportion with their hearing.*—Mistake me not; I had rather never speak word more while I live, than speak a word to gratify scoffers at religion, who scornfully twit those that are better than themselves with their hearing so many sermons: but yet I dare not soothe-up *those* in their hypocrisy, whose religion lies all in hearing of sermons, as if there were no other duties to be minded; no family duties, no relative duties, whereas only hearing will make at best but ricketty Christians.

2. *They are also to be reprov'd, that only go to see a sermon.*—“What went ye out into the wilderness to see?” What? To see fashions? They can give a more exact account of every fantastical dress, than of any one savoury truth they heard; whereas it is said of Christ’s hearers: “The eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him.” (Luke iv. 20.) A wandering eye is an infallible evidence of a wandering heart.

#### USE.

But I will come closer to the case, in a USE OF EXHORTATION; with DIRECTIONS to all sorts of hearers, that they would forthwith set upon the practice of this great comprehensive duty, to give Christ a satisfying account why they attend upon the ministry of the word.

“Every one must give an account of himself to God.” That you may do it with comfort, take these or such-like

DIRECTIONS.

**DIRECTION I.** *Set yourselves toward the removing of those hinderances which, till you in good earnest set upon the removing of them, you can never give a good account to yourselves, much less to Christ, of any soul-business.*—I will name but four, and with the naming of them give a word of direction how to attempt their removal. For instance :

1. *The state of unregeneracy is a dead weight to the soul.*—It keeps it down from lifting-up itself heavenward. One dead in sin blesseth himself that his conscience is not troublesome ; that is, it is neither squeamish to boggle at sin, nor inquisitive after the danger of it.

The only **REMEDY** I shall name is this ; namely, Mind conversion as far as it is possible for an unconverted person to mind it. “How far is that ?” Thou canst never tell till thou hast tried. Query, *Whether ever any pushed this forward to the utmost, and missed of conversion.* Not that any thing [which] an unconverted person can possibly do, can merit grace ; but the soul’s holding-on in its attempt, and in some measure breaking through the corruptions and temptations that way-lay it, is a token for good, that the Spirit of grace is hopefully at work, to bring over the soul to Christ ; the Spirit of God saying to that soul, what David said to his son Solomon : “Arise and be doing, and the Lord be with thee.” (1 Chron. xxii. 16.)

2. *The second hinderance is love of ease.*—Persons do not love to meddle with that which they apprehend will be a troublesome business. “What ! to be always upon our watch ? to be always examining why, and to what end, we so much as hear a sermon ? This is wearisome and intolerable.” For **REMEDY** :

Rouse up thy soul, as thou wouldest do thy body in a lethargy ; thou wouldest then be jogged, and pulled, and shaken ; there is more need in thy soul-lethargy. It is the voice of him that deserves to be thy Beloved that calls thee ; do not give an answer directly contrary to Christ’s spouse : “I am awake, but my heart is asleep.” (Canticles v. 2.)

3. *A third hinderance is unbelief.*—As to this, I speak not now of the state of unbelief ; but they do not believe this to be so needful as it is represented. The truth is, if we run up sins into their causes, we shall find unbelief to be the most teeming mother of most omissions, and of more than omissions. For instance : *Why do you omit such a duty ?* “I do not believe it to be necessary.” *Why do you not reflect upon the duties which you do not omit ?* “I do not believe God requires it.” For **CURE** :

Consider : you have more grounds and motives for faith in this matter, than you have for any thing you practise. For instance : you pray ; (I hope you do, I would not have my supposition fail me ;) it is more your duty to reflect *why* you pray, and *how* you pray, than it

is merely to pray. You may teach a parrot to speak words of prayer ; but it is a special exercise of grace to pray aright as to the manner of it. So, you believe it is a duty to attend upon the word ; it is more your duty to propose a right end, and to reflect how that end is pursued, attained, or lost, than it is barely to hear. Pardon me, if I use a nauseous metaphor to set forth an odious sin : some of you bring your dogs with you, and they hear the sound of words, lie still, and depart when the sermon is ended. Upon reflection, you will be ashamed to do no more.

4. *A fourth hinderance is the satisfaction that natural conscience takes in a little tiny devotion.*—Natural conscience requireth a little, and but a little ; a little will satisfy it, so it be but something. Doeg “was detained before the Lord.” (1 Sam. xxi. 7.) It had been better for him to have been sick in his bed, than to have been quieting his conscience with such circumstantiated devotion. For CURE :

Do but review what thy natural conscience takes satisfaction in, and thou wilt be more dissatisfied ; bring but thy conscience, with thy duty, to the rule, and then examine it. To act only like a slave, (Gal. iv. 30,) that desires no more than to turn his work off hand, to do no more than he needs must,—this leads to rejection ; whereas a conscience guided by scripture will put you upon doing all as a child, that the manner of it may please your heavenly Father ; and this will qualify you for an heavenly inheritance.

This is the first direction : *Remove hinderances.*

DIRECT. II. *Call yourselves to an account, BEFORE, IN, and AFTER the hearing of the word, to what end thou camest, and how the end is pursued, or dropped.*

1. *Before you hear.*—Solomon adviseth thus : “Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to offer the sacrifice of fools ; for they consider not that they do evil ;” (Eccles. v. 1 ; ) be more ready to receive instruction, and to accept of what God says, which will be thy wisdom, than to offer sacrifice, and neglect obedience, like foolish hypocrites. And a greater than Solomon, our Lord Jesus Christ, (Luke xiv. 28—33,) cautions us by a double metaphor at his school-door, when we come to be his disciples, namely, that spiritual edification will be in this like worldly building,—[it will] cost more than we imagine ; and our spiritual warfare will be in this like the carnal,—more costly than at first we conceive : it will cost us more careful thoughts, more waking nights, more painful days, more prayers and tears, more self-denial and contempt of the world, than inconsiderate persons will believe.

For your care before you hear, I shall propose but three things :—

(1.) *Renew your repentance of the sins of your hearing.*—The more particularly, and expressly, and heartily you do this, the better you will be able to give account of your attendance upon the word. This will be like the washing or scouring of a vessel before you fill it, that what you put into it may not be spoiled. According to that of the apostle James, “Lay apart,” not only restrain and keep in, but put



off and throw away, "all filthiness."\* (James i. 21.) It is a metaphor borrowed from the filth of the body, and thence transferred to the soul. Sin is a sordid thing, and we must not only lay aside all things that defile us, but "all superfluity of naughtiness." Some interpret it of those excrements which we are in pain till we are rid of them: as if he had said, "Wash off all outward filth, and purge out all inward; for without this we can never savingly receive the word."

(2.) *Propose to yourselves such an end for your hearing, that you will not be ashamed of.*—If God should give you your liberty, propose what end you will to yourselves, provided it be such as upon serious reflection you will not be ashamed of. For instance: you go to hear a sermon to see a mistress: is not that an end to be ashamed of? Or you fetch a walk for your recreation, and sit down to rest you at the end of it to hear a sermon; and when you have rested you return: may you not be ashamed of this? You go to a sermon for the language or notions of it; though both these may be excellent, your end is sinful. But yet I will close this with this advice; namely, Hold on to hear sermons, though with an end to be repented of; for while you play with the bait, you may be caught with the hook; while you are in the way of grace, you may be graciously surprised.

(3.) Above all, *preface your hearing with prayer.*—As praying is the last thing the minister doth before he preacheth, let praying be the last thing you do before you go out to hear. "Neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." (1 Cor. iii. 7.) Many times our profiting is according to our praying. But here again I advise you to hear, though you pray not at all; for by hearing you will be convinced that it is your duty to pray, you will be instructed and encouraged in it.

2. *In hearing.*—When you are engaged, pray do not gratify Satan then by a diversion for preparation. No, though it be by prayer; (any other than ejaculatory;) that must have been before. Herein likewise take these three directions:—

(1.) *Set yourselves before God, to hear Christ speaking to you from heaven.*—The more actually and seriously you presentiate Christ unto yourselves, the more you will give up yourselves to him. I grant, we cannot preach as the apostles wrote, by the immediate guidance of the Holy Ghost, without all error and mistake; (query, *Whether all their popular sermons were so infallibly guided?* It seems not, Gal. ii. 11;) yet Christ speaks through us as through a cracked trumpet: though we betray our own frailties, yet, for the main of our sermons, we dare say, "Thus saith the Lord," which is a proof of Christ speaking in us. (2 Cor. xiii. 3.) This will be matter of thanksgivings by both your ministers and yourselves, when you receive "the word of God, which ye heard of us, not as the word of men, but (as it is in truth) the word of God;" then it will certainly "work effectually." (1 Thess. ii. 13.)

(2.) *Mix your hearing with ejaculatory prayers.*—Ejaculations to

\* Ὑποκαταβάς, sordes.

God, and soliloquies to yourselves, will help to make and keep the heart tight. Jog your own hearts, as you do your sleeping neighbour. Call-in your thoughts while they are within call, and, as far as it is possible, think of nothing but what you are about. A heart thus confined, is likely to be most enlarged both with grace and comfort.

(3.) *Be sure to hold fast the scope of what you hear.*—Not only those passages which more particularly affect you, but that which is the main design of the sermon. I think, *this* the weakest memory may retain; and I think, this will do most good when it is retained. In short, be sure you retain something. Do thus, or somewhat like it, in hearing.

3. *After hearing.*—These questions were proposed by Christ, both negatively and affirmatively, some months, perhaps some years, after they had heard John. And Christ proposeth that with some vehemency. That you may give a good answer, I shall commend to you but two things:—

(1.) *Consideration.*—Chew the cud; this is the metaphor that is commonly made use of. The beasts that chewed the cud, were clean for food and sacrifice. (Lev. xi. 3.) These creatures gather up their food into a kind of inward bag, and then they sit down and bring it up to chew it over again, and then convey it into the stomach for nourishment. So *that* Christian *whose* self and service is a sacrifice acceptable to God, gathers up what he thinks the best in a sermon, and, when retired, chews it over again for his spiritual nourishment and growth in grace. As your considering, thinking man is the only wise man, so your considering, thinking Christian is the only thriving Christian.

(2.) *Add something to your practice, and continue that till it give way to something else of greater moment.*—I am far from laying any stress upon any spiritual prudentials that I can offer. But I would humbly propose it to thinking Christians, whether if every Lord's day, (I do not exclude other days; but,) query, *Whether we may not expect more from Lord's-days' sermons than any other?* the Lord's day being the time of divine appointment, and other days, of human conveniency. The business of the Lord's day is devotion; on other days we make a scape from worldly business to a sermon, and then rush into the world again, as if we would redeem that time for the world that we spent with God. I query, therefore, if we do charge ourselves, upon what we hear on the Lord's day, to practise something more, or something more carefully, than before, and to keep to that till that give place to something else of greater moment. Did we beg something of God more this week than the last; did we single out some sin for mortification more this week than the last; did we do something enjoined on the Lord's day; this would be to us like the shew-bread to Israel, which was made thus: they brought twenty-four pecks of wheat-meal, out of which they sifted twenty-four pottles of fine flour, of which they made twelve unleavened cakes; every one was ten hand-breadths long, and five broad, and seven

fingers high ; which signified the multitude of the faithful, presented unto God in his church, as upon a pure table, continually serving him ; (Lev. xxiv. 8, 9 ;) as also the spiritual repast which the church of God obtaineth from and before God, who feedeth them with Christ the Bread of life, especially every sabbath-day. Were this, or some such course taken from week to week, would not this hook into your practice all the great duties of religion ? And so you would give a good account of your hearing ; but,

DIRECT. III. My third direction is this : *Do not only satisfy yourselves, but carry on your inquiry, that it may through grace satisfy Christ.*—My text is a question proposed by Christ, and to him must we give our answer. You may give a plausible account to ministers ; but pray remember you must give an account to Christ. You may, by *leading* questions, mislead ministers ; as persons that go to law do their lawyers ; and they lose *their cause* by it. But when, by studied hypocrisy, you mislead ministers to gratify you with a mistaken judgment, you lose *your souls* by it. It is Christ that asks the question, not to be informed by you : “for he knows what is in man,” better than they themselves. Christ would have you to be plain-hearted and ingenuous, that wherein you see cause to complain, he may help you. When the trembling soul, after the hearing of such ministers as would undecieve them, is like Jeremy, for his people’s being deceived by false prophets :—“My heart within me is broken because of the prophets ; all my bones shake ; I am like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine hath overcome, because of the Lord, and because of the words of his holiness.” (Jer. xxiii. 9.) As if you were to say, “Fear and trembling take hold of me. I am ashamed, I am at my wit’s end ! The word of God calls for so *much* holiness, and I have so *little* ! Thou inquirest, Lord, what I hear for. I dare not say, that my intentions and ends are so serious as they should be ; I am afraid to own any thing that is good :”—Christ, in a way of compassion, is ready to encourage such a soul. Canst thou but sincerely say, thou comest to meet Christ, and to learn of Christ ; Jesus Christ welcomes such to him, and they may answer him with comfort.

Under this head, consider,

1. *Christ asks thee here in this world, that thou mayest now be able to give such an answer as thou mayest stand-by at the last day, when there will be neither hopes nor time to rectify it, if it be insufficient.*—It is in this something like our pleadings in courts of judicature ; we must put-in our plea, and stand to it : “Thou knowest, Lord, there is, through grace, something of sincerity ; but, for any thing else, do thou, Lord, answer for me.” Pray mark this ; when once the soul can bring the question back again to Christ, thus : “Thou askest me what I come for. Lord, I come for thee to answer for me. I cannot satisfy my own conscience : it is ready to fly in my face. Much less can I satisfy my jealous Master, unless thou compassionately answer for me. Lord, thou usest to answer for thine own.”

May we then suppose Christ thus to inquire?—"Who shall lay any thing to the charge of any one who sincerely comes to wait for me in mine ordinances?" Can we suppose any one to be so daring as to perk up, and say?—"I charge all these to be a company of proud, conceited hypocrites. They will needs be wiser than their neighbours. They spend their time in running up and down to hear sermons." Christ doth, as it were, answer: "Dost thou make this a crime? What he did, it was out of love to me, and obedience to me. 'He hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from him.' (Luke x. 42.) And, for you, who are so ready to accuse others, and excuse yourselves for slighting or ill-managing all the means offered for your salvation: 'Bind him hand and foot,' that he may make no resistance; 'take him away,' that he may neither make an escape, nor have any hopes of mercy; 'and cast him into outer darkness, where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'" (Matt. xxii. 13.)

2. *If you do not give Christ an answer which he will accept of, it is in vain to expect relief from any other.*—If the Father be offended, Christ interposeth himself, bears the wrath of God, and prevents it from us. Christ is the Days-man between God and us.

If the Spirit be grieved by our quenching his motions, and striving against his striving with us to hear and obey the Lord Jesus:—provided that rise not to the sin against the Holy Ghost, which the greatest part of trembling Christians often fear they have committed; though by the way let me tell them, that their fear [lest] they have committed it, yields them sufficient assurance they have not committed it; for this sin is always attended with such hardness of heart that they sin without remorse:—so that while the Spirit overcomes their resistances, and prevails with them to comply with Christ, through Christ their sins against the Spirit shall be pardoned.

But when the Angel of the covenant, Jesus Christ, was promised "to be sent before" the Israelites in the wilderness, "to keep them in the way, and to bring them into the place prepared for them;" they are expressly charged "to beware of him, and obey his voice. Provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions," but severely punish them. (Exod. xxiii. 20, 21.) Not that sins against Christ shall never be pardoned, though repented of; but to keep us from adventuring upon sin, as if it should easily be pardoned; whereas the apostle tells us, "If we sin wilfully, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin." (Heb. x. 26.) That is, those that reject and renounce Christ's sacrifice for sin, there is no other sacrifice can atone [to] God for them. I grant, that this text chiefly concerns the unpardonable sin. But, I pray you, consider: those that do not make it the main business of their lives to give Christ such an account as he will accept of, what improvement they have made of his word; if they live and die in that neglect, they shall as certainly perish as they who commit the sin against the Holy Ghost. There are but very few [who] can commit that sin; but an incredible number commit this, without considering the danger of it. Now, Christians,

is your time to make-up such an account as you must stand or fall by to eternity. (O that I had but one minute's such conception of eternity, as it is possible to be had in this world! I reckon it would influence my whole life.) Christ's sentence at last will be according to the account we give him here; and if his sentence be not as you would have it, there will be no altering of it. Your repentance then will be no small part of your torment.

**OBJECTION.** "I cannot think that Christ will be so sharp and severe. This affrights me more than any thing. This is the most terrible consideration that ever I heard. I expected relief from Christ at last, and that Christ should hear me at my first call; though I have neglected to hear him, so as to have any practical regard to what he said all my life. The thoughts of what you say would amaze me, did I believe it. But I hope to find it otherwise."

**ANSWER 1.** Do not flatter yourselves with vain hopes; but let what I have spoken fright you to your duty, not from it. You may expect as much from Christ as you can reasonably desire. Would you have Christ to be to you like a foolish mother to a cockered child? Let the child do what he will; do but chide him, or threaten him, he runs to his mother, and she will excuse all, and bear him out in all, though it be to his future undoing of soul and body. Christians, never expect it: Christ will never do so. Christ tells us beforehand, that none shall be more ready than he to help us against sin, provided we will be ruled by him. But we shall find, none will be more severe against it, if they be impenitently rebellious. "As he cried, and they would not hear; so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the Lord of hosts." (Zech. vii. 13.) And,

2. How absurdly disingenuous is it, to be careless of our account, and to expect that Christ should answer for us! Christ was more ready to answer for his disciples, than they could be to ask him, when, through infirmity, they were sleeping, when they should have been praying. But it is absurd to expect any thing like it, when it is not infirmity but wilfulness, through dislike of his service, and hatred of holiness. You would verify the Pharisees' slander of Christ, that he is "a friend of publicans and sinners;" a friend to their sins, not to their souls. In short, therefore, be conscientiously solicitous to give an account to Christ, such as may be graciously acceptable; and though there is nothing beyond this, yet there may be something over and above.

**DIRECT. IV.** Let this, therefore, be my last direction:

*Make it your care to give a silencing account to the devil, and all his agents.*—I grant, that neither he nor they will ever be silent. They will reproach and revile you. They will mutter and whisper, and secretly say and do all they can against you; and they will never want something out of which they will force matter of reproach. You have Christ, in this very context, saying, "Whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not

lamented. For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children." (Matt. xi. 16—18.) They do as it were say of John, "The devil enables him to endure such hardship:" and therefore they reject his doctrine. And they reproach Christ's person, as if his more free temper encouraged licentiousness. Let a godly man's conversation be what it will, it will never please those that hate holiness. But yet, my brethren, it will strangely muzzle them. They can but grumble out a reproach; or if they speak out, it is by clamour to drown the whispers of their consciences, when they can say something like that: "So she gleaned in the field until even, and beat out that she had gleaned. And she took it up, and went into the city: and brought forth, and gave to her that she had reserved, after she was sufficed. And her mother-in-law said unto her, Where hast thou gleaned to-day?" &c. (Ruth ii. 17—19.) As if you were to say, "Such of Christ's harvest-men have been at work, and I have been gleaned after them. I have met with that which to me hath been a feast. The word hath been refreshing; and I can show you some of the handfuls that I have gleaned. I have attended upon the ministry of the word, and have picked up some knowledge, who was before an ignorant wretch, and never minded my soul. I have picked up something of food for my soul, whereas I was pining away in mine iniquities. My conversation will witness where I have been gleaned; and I humbly resolve, there I will abide, in the use of such means, while God vouchsafes them." When you thus resolve, you must expect Satan will do his utmost to flatter or fright you out of your purposes. But while you can approve your ends to Christ, yourselves may answer Satan in the hinderances he will throw in your way. For example:

*Satan.* Why art thou so solicitous for thy soul? Thou mayest be saved without all this ado. It is more than needs.

*Soul.* No, Satan! All I can do is too little, did not Christ undertake for me. But I will not do the less for Christ's doing so much.

*Satan.* All thou doest is to no purpose: thou shalt be damned at last.

*Soul.* Should it be so, I would rather serve God for nothing, than thee for all thy flattering, lying promises. I will do God all the service I can for the mercies I have received, though I should never have more. The very work of religion is better than the work of sin, even without a reward.

*Satan.* Spare thyself, poor soul! Thou art not all spirit: thou hast flesh and blood as well as others. Why wilt thou expose thyself to contempt and sufferings? No man in his wits will court a general hatred.

*Soul.* Peace, Satan! Be it known to thee, and to all thyimps, I had rather have your hatred than your love. All your kindness to me is to ruin me.

*Satan.* Be not so conceited of thine own wisdom. Look about

thee in the world. Have not others souls to save as well as thou? and they do not proudly pretend to be wiser than their neighbours.

*Soul.* Be gone, Satan! I will parley no longer. If others neglect salvation, therefore must I? Will their missing of salvation relieve me for the loss of mine? Though a Peter persuade Christ to spare himself;—nay, when his friends went out to lay hold of him, thinking his zeal had crazed him;—nay, when his brethren had wheedled-in his mother to send to him, to abate his work;—he would not yield a minute. (Mark iii. 21, 31.) By the grace of God, (though I shall come infinitely short,) I will make Christ my pattern; and therefore, Satan, say thy worst, and do thy worst. Through Christ, I defy thee.

Will not some such account (in some respect, I may say) to the devil himself, more confound him, when he shall see all his spiteful insinuations work out comfortable evidences of present grace; ay, of growing grace, and future glory? If this will not silence him, it will make him roar in his chains. When he finds himself tied up from doing what mischief he would, he roars for vexation; while the gracious person (thanks to Christ!) laughs at him. "Out of the mouths of" very unlikely persons "hast thou ordained strength, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger." (Psalm viii. 2.) As if the Psalmist had said, "God doth by the spiritual skill and strength which he gives even to young, weak converts, unfit to grapple with an enemy,—God enables even such to silence, confound, and conquer the enemies of God and his people, and the devil in the head of them, whose kingdom and power are broken by this means, and those that fight under his banner against God and Christ." And pray, observe the title here given him; namely, "the avenger." He, being sentenced by God to eternal torments, makes it his business to revenge himself, what he can, upon God and Christ, upon his children and servants. Christians, if you can through grace make Satan himself, against his will, help you to profit by the word, this will raise your souls beyond what is ordinary, both for grace and comfort; or, if God in his wisdom suspend such manifestations of himself, yet such exercise of grace shall certainly tend to the multiplying of praises in the other world.

And now, though I have, in my pitiful manner, answered the case, my work is not yet done till I have answered a COMPLAINT upon the case; and it is the complaint of those who have least cause; of those who give Christ that answer to his question which satisfies him, but yet cannot give an answer [which] will satisfy themselves. Their hearts ache from the very proposing of the question, and their hearts misgive them under all that is said in answer to it.

COMPLAINT I. "We have more cause to complain than we are able to express. O the sermons that we have lost, of which we can give no account at all! and of those that are not utterly lost, we have made no suitable improvement. We are convinced that we should be as impartial now in examining, whether we have got saving faith by hearing of the word; we should be as strict *now*, as if we were

upon our dying bed. (We know not whether ever we shall have a death-bed; many, more likely to live than ourselves, die suddenly; and why not we?) Nay, rather *now*; for we have not now wearisome sickness to disable us. We have now those helps that we cannot have then; freedom of ordinances in public, capacities for duties in secret. We may now bring things to an issue, which is then next to impossible. These and a thousand such considerations even fright me. When I sit down to think, my thoughts even overwhelm me, to reflect what a sorry account I can give of all that I have heard."

These and more doleful complaints are the usual entertainments of their most serious Christian friends. To all which I shall offer these answers:—

**ANSWER.** The word of God which they apply to their sorrow, they ought as well to apply to their comfort. For those who are really grieved that they cannot satisfy themselves, much less (as they think) Christ,—they are mistaken; for Christ is ordinarily best satisfied with that [with] which the gracious soul is least satisfied. For instance, that prayer which he is most ashamed of, Christ most approves of. "The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land." (Canticles ii. 12.) It is spring-time in the soul. When the groans of a contrite heart sound harsh to others, they are music in Christ's ears: not that Christ delights in his people's sorrows, but as they are evidences of his graces in them, and of his Spirit's abiding with them. It is only the gracious soul that is grieved at heart, that he cannot give Christ a better account of his profiting. "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for my iniquities are increased over my head, and my trespass is grown up unto the heavens. What shall I say after this? There is hope in Israel concerning this thing." (Ezra ix. 6, 10; x. 2.) The apostle expressly assures us, that "those that judge themselves shall not be judged" with a judgment of condemnation. (1 Cor. xi. 31, 32.) Cheer up therefore, poor drooping soul! and to thy comfort consider whether this be not the only thing wherein Christ and you believers be not of the same mind. Christ puts a better interpretation of his actings, than he himself dares. Many a time Christ owns that as grace, which he condemns for hypocrisy. Christ forgives him that which he can never forgive himself. Christ says, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" for that which he ever finds fault with.

**COMPLAINT II.** But the complaining soul saith, I mistake him, I speak to the wrong person: "Propose comfort to those that are grieved [that] they cannot give Christ a satisfying account; whereas I am not troubled enough, nor grieved enough. A serious reflection upon such returns as mine to Christ's kindness would certainly break any heart but mine. But, alas! I am next to nothing affected with it."

I therefore further **ANSWER**: Thy complaining for want of sensible complaining entitles thee to comfort. Darest thou own so much as this, that thou art troubled [because] thou canst be no more troubled at the shameful account thou givest to Christ? Thou art afraid that word



has overtaken thee: "Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart," &c. (Isai. vi. 9, 10.) Surely thou canst not think worse of thyself than this. Let me tell thee, The more thou thinkest of this, the less cause thou hast to apply this to thyself; for those whom God gives up to judicial hardness, never think or speak of such things but in scorn, and to make a mock of them; and that thou darest not do. There is another word for thee to think of: "Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the place of my rest? To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at thy word." (Isai. lxvi. 1, 2.) If God hath any place upon earth for his repose, it is in that soul that stands in awe of his word, and with due reverence receives it. What, dost thou complain thou art not troubled enough? nor contrite enough? not humbled enough? How do many souls bring their complaints to ministers, and bring their bills to congregations, for brokenness of heart, and a deep sense of sin, when they are so much broken already, that their other duties are almost justled out by it! Do not therefore overlook that text: "The kingdom of God is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." (Rom. xiv. 17.) We should make it our business, to live in a serious course of holiness toward God; and righteousness toward men, in the love and practice of peace with all; and in the joyful sense of the love of God, and hopes of glory; taking pleasure in the promoting of the graces and comforts of others in our way to heaven. Christians, forget not, that "the joy of the Lord is your strength." (Neh. viii. 10.) The serving of God with cheerfulness strengtheneth both body and mind; whereas excess of grief damps the spirit and enfeebles the body, unfitting us for the service of either God or man.

COMPLAINT III. But the complaining soul will still complain: "Say what you will or can, comfort belongs not to me. I may say with Asaph, 'My soul refuseth to be comforted. I remember God, and am troubled: I complain, and my spirit is overwhelmed. God holds mine eyes waking: I am so troubled that I cannot speak.' (Psalm lxxvii. 2—4.) As if I were to say, 'I cannot but reject all the consolations that my friends suggest to me. The thoughts of God's goodness, wisdom, and power have sometimes been refreshing to me; but now they are matter of terror to me. God is angry with me, and I cannot bear it. My trouble is so great, I cannot express it. Your speaking comfort to me, is but as the singing of songs to a heavy heart.'"

Notwithstanding all this, and a great deal more of such complaints, yet I will assert, and make good my assertion, that comfort belongs to them that conclude against themselves that their case is hopeless; and I will try to make those very persons confess it. We are not to take men's own word, that either the promises or threatenings are their portion; but we must examine the grounds of their preemptory

assertion. For instance: If a wicked wretch shall confidently boast, he doth not in the least doubt but he shall as certainly be saved as any of those that take most care about their salvation, though he never troubles his thoughts about it; do you think, that, in taking his accounts, Christ will let his confidence pass for saving faith, and give him heaven for his presumption? Surely, you cannot think he will, while he hath given us so plain a rule how to judge of words by things; namely, "By their fruits ye shall know them. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit." (Matt. vii. 16, 18.) So then as a man shall not save his soul for his groundless presumption, so neither shall he lose his soul for his groundless despondency. Thou complainest of thyself, not of Christ. "He is precious" in thine eye; (1 Peter ii. 7;) therefore thy faith is saving. Thou fearest that thou dost not cleave to Christ, yet thou hadst rather die than offend him: this is a faith of adherence, and that is saving. Thou complainest, but restlessly strivest to be more inwardly, outwardly, universally holy: that is a good evidence [that] thy state is good, though, while under a temptation or under a cloud, thou canst not see it to be so.

COMPLAINT IV. But thou still sayest, "I am an unprofitable hearer; and I cannot believe that Christ will pardon what is amiss, and accept of any thing as good, of what I can do; and therefore pray quit this way of answering my complaint, by telling me of comfort: if you have any thing else to offer, I will hear it. I may expect rather to hear of Christ in a clap of thunder, than in a soft and still voice."

I will speak to thee no more directly of comfort, but only ask thee a question about the comforts of others. What are thy thoughts about the comforts and joys of the Holy Ghost? Are there any such things? or are they mere fancies? If there be any such things, what thinkest thou of those that partake of them? Is the enjoyment of them desirable? Are they happy that have them? Whether is more eligible, —to spend your life in mourning complaints, or to spend it in the joyful praises of the Lord our Redeemer? Are these questions hard to be answered? These questions are out of question.

"O, there are no joys like the joys of the Holy Ghost: the best of carnal joys are incomparably below them! Though I fear I shall never be so happy as to enjoy them, yet I cannot but admire them that do. Do you ask which is more eligible,—a life of mourning complaints, or a life of joys? Ask a man under a fit of the stone, whether that is more eligible than a state of health."

Well, dost thou speak this heartily? Ask thy heart again, that thou mayest not mistake me, or go back from thine own answer. Are the joys of the Holy Ghost realities? Are they unspeakably beyond all other joys? Are they happy that enjoy them? Wilt thou stand to thy word? Then they are all thine own. Thou hast a title to them at present, and, as sure as thy Redeemer lives, thou shalt be put into the possession of them. Mark how I prove it. Every one that hath truth of grace, hath an indefeasible title to glory: "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God;

that ye may know that ye have eternal life." (1 John v. 13.) They have [not only] a *seal* for assurance, but an *earnest*, which is a begun possession, (2 Cor. i. 22,) elsewhere called "the first-fruits." (Rom. viii. 23.) But every one that prizeth the holy joys of the Holy Ghost hath truth of grace. Graceless persons make a mock of the joys of the Holy Ghost. They can scarce forbear sneering at the mention of them. He prefers carnal comforts before them. "Many say, Who will show us any good?" But the gracious soul says, "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased." (Psalm iv. 6, 7.) This is "the godly man, whom the Lord hath set apart for himself." (Verse 3.) Not any one that is not a saint himself hath any esteem for a saint as a saint: "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death." (1 John iii. 14.) Now, I dare appeal to yourselves, in the very midst of all your complaints: When thou fearest thou shalt never have any of these joys, yet thou hast a value for them above any other. Thou preferrest thy complaints before worldly pleasures. Thou dost not, thou canst not, but follow Christ, though it be tremblingly. If all these be not infallible evidences of grace, what are? Chide thyself and pray thyself out of thy complaining temper. "Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works." (Eccles. ix. 7.)

And thus you have my answer, as well to the complaint, as to the case: God make it beneficial to all that shall read it!

#### QUESTIONS.

There remain some QUESTIONS depending upon the Case, that require some answer: I will attempt that also.

QUESTION I. "When we make choice of a minister to be, under Christ, the special guide of our souls, how shall we avoid the sinful preferring of one before another? How may we escape that partiality which is one of the great sins of the age,—to cry up some, and decry others; to overvalue some, and to undervalue others? 'Every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ.' (1 Cor. i. 12.)—'*I am of Paul.* He had an extraordinary call to the apostolical office: there is none [who] preaches free grace like him. *He withstood Peter to the face, because he was to be blamed.* (Gal. ii. 11.) And as for Apollos, he had need to learn of his hearers: *When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.* (Acts xviii. 26—28.) None of these things can be spoken of Paul, and therefore *I am for Paul.*'—Another says, '*I am for Apollos.* He is a powerful preacher, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, fervent in spirit, diligent in the things of the Lord, speaking boldly in the synagogues, mightily convincing the Jews. (Verses 24—28.) I am for Apollos. Paul is nothing to him for a preacher: *his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible;* (2 Cor. x. 10;) and there-

192 SERMON I. HOW TO GIVE CHRIST A SATISFYING ACCOUNT, fore *I am for Apollos.*'—Another saith, '*I am for Cephas.* He was the chief apostle. Christ gave him a special charge to *feed his sheep and his lambs*; (John xxi. 15—17;) and therefore I will be of his flock.'—Another says, '*I am for Christ.* All these have their imperfections, but Christ hath none; and therefore I will expect the immediate teaching of Christ by his Spirit. I am not for the teachings of men.' And thus Christians do not only differ from one another in their esteem of preachers, but we shall find them differ from themselves in their esteem of the same persons. They magnify and vilify the same ministers. 'John was a burning and a shining light, and ye were willing for a season,' and but for a season, 'to rejoice in his light.' (John v. 35.) To Christ himself they said one day, 'Hosanna!' and, the next day, 'Crucify him!' And of Paul: the Galatians one while received 'him as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus;' presently after are as shy of him as of an enemy, because he insists upon some truths [which] they have no mind to. (Gal. iv. 14—16.) How may this distemper be prevented or cured?"

ANSWER 1. *Keep up your esteem of Jesus Christ, as your great Shepherd, and of all faithful ministers, as his under-officers.*—"We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus's sake." (2 Cor. iv. 5.) It is impossible to overvalue Christ, provided you do not *mistake* his work, and *neglect* your own. Do not expect that from Christ which he will not do: he will not teach you without the ministry of man, where he vouchsafes it. Christ hath the words of eternal life, but yet he commits to the ushers of his school "the word of reconciliation:" and "we pray you in Christ's stead, to be reconciled to God." (2 Cor. v. 19, 20.) And it is Christ that saith expressly: "He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me." (Luke x. 16.) This doth not only relate to extraordinary officers, such as the apostles; for Christ as well gave "pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." (Eph. iv. 11, 12.) And therefore conscientiously attend upon the ministry of men, but expect the benefit of it only by the blessing of Christ. Whoever plants or waters, the success is from Christ.

2. *Take heed of a narrow spirit; confine not the church of Christ to a party.*—No, not the best party upon earth. What, hath Christ only these few sheep in the wilderness? If Christ should have no other subjects, his would be a little flock indeed. Whereas Christ's sealed ones, who are sealed for holiness, are "a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, standing before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands." (Rev. vii. 9.) Christians, be as severe against yourselves as you will; but be not so against others. Say to thyself, "If I should be less strict than I am, I should question mine own fitness for church-communion. But I dare not judge so of another: I do not know his temptations: I do

not know how far God might leave him to himself, 'to try him, that he might know what was in his heart,' &c. (2 Chron. xxxii. 31.) Shall I from such an action judge of his state? No, I dare not." Be severe to yourselves, but be charitable unto others.

3. *Take heed of over-esteeming any, lest God blast his ministry as to you, that it be less profitable than before.*—You may easily observe, that when any one is overvalued, God is robbed of the overplus of honour that is given to any creature. This is a tender thing, and God will not bear it; let a well-ordered self-love steer you right in this matter. Query: *Whether ministers' or people's falling into scandalous sin, or dangerous error, spring not from this root?*

These cautions concern as well the sincere as others; but my last under this head concerns only hypocrites, or those who have too much cause to suspect themselves to be so.

4. *Take heed of being swayed by private interest.*—"To have men's persons in admiration, because of advantage;" (Jude 16;) that is, of flattering persons upon some carnal account. You have the apostle naming some of their spiritual diseases: *If any man affect to teach or to hear otherwise; and consent not to wholesome words*—That is, words that tend to cure the soul of spiritual distempers. *Even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the doctrine which is according to godliness*—That is, that doctrine which promotes downright godliness. *He is proud*—That is, he is swelled up, he is great in his own esteem, though "knowing nothing" solidly. *But doting brain-sick about questions of no use, and strifes of words*—Contending about words. *Whereof cometh envy*—Of those that are wiser than himself. *Strife*—An ignorant person will not yield that another knows more than himself. *Railings*—What he wants in arguments, he will make up with foul language. *Evil surmisings*—Uncharitably suspecting what they will not speak out. *Perverse disputings*—Not to clear-up truth, but to shuffle-in error. *Of men of corrupt minds*—Distempered in their heads. *Destitute of the truth*—Have quitted savoury truth. *Supposing that gain is godliness*—Whatever tends to their worldly interest, that is very well consistent with their religion. *From such withdraw thyself*—Have nothing to do with them. (1 Tim. vi. 3—5.)

QUESTION II. "When there is a difference in the directions that are given by ministers, what shall those do who are to observe them? Prescriptions are sometimes peremptory, and we are charged to do expressly thus; and when we hear the same duty pressed by another, he directeth otherwise. 'If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for the' spiritual 'warfare?'" (1 Cor. xiv. 8.)

ANSWER 1. Those that ordinarily ask this question, do not do it for practical direction, but for captious diversion. They do not speak by way of inquiry, but excuse. They will except against this and the other, but they will follow none; and therefore I will pass by these.

2. *Do but practise that wherein all the ministers of Christ are*

*agreed, and you are safe.*—They all give the same directions for substance: though their directions are *different*, they are not *contrary*. You know there is nothing more ordinary than for two ministers to preach upon one text, and to handle it different ways, and to draw from it different inferences, and different uses; but while they keep to scripture, and to the analogy of faith, all is commendable and beneficial. Christ is pleased variously to distribute both graces and gifts, both to ministers and Christians; and it is to the glory of his wisdom and grace that he doth so. All who are faithful to Christ and souls, agree in such things as these; namely, to convince of the evil of sin, and of the necessity of regeneration. There is none that is worth the name of a minister that can give sin a good word: they cannot speak slightly of sin; they cannot encourage sin; they cannot, they dare not, flatter you in your sins: they all agree to assure you, that “your sin will find you out;” (Num. xxxii. 23;) that if you do not find out your sin to repentance, your sin will find you out to your ruin. They all agree to direct you to Christ: some do it with more skill and warmth than others, but all agree in the thing: “Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” (1 Cor. iii. 11.) They all agree in pressing a life of holiness, to evidence the sincerity of your faith: “Without holiness no man shall see the Lord” with comfort. (Heb. xii. 14.)

3. *Endeavour to learn the holy skill and the holy zeal of making your advantage of the different talents of Christ’s faithful ministers.*—Hear none but whom you may groundedly take to be ministers of Christ; and then esteem such for their Master’s sake. Whoever brings me a message from Christ shall be welcome. “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet” (though sweaty, dusty, dirty) “of him that bringeth good tidings” of the dissolution of the Babylonian captivity! (Isai. lii. 7;) “that publisheth salvation” by Jesus Christ: how much more amiable must these be! “The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal, dividing to every man severally as he will.” (1 Cor. xii. 7, 11.) No one shall have all, lest he should be proud; none shall want all, lest he should be discouraged. (Verse 21.)

4. *Strive to approve yourselves to be of a healing temper.*—You will hereby get more profit to yourselves, and be more useful unto others. “Blessed are the peace-makers: for they shall be called the children of God.” (Matt. v. 9.) Those that long and labour for peace, they are like God and Christ, and shall be owned as such. It is a duty for every one to sit down under a particular pastor, for the enjoyment of all ordinances; but as still holding communion with the truly catholic church. Though you can hold *local* communion but with one congregation at once, yet you may hold *mental* communion with the whole church of Christ at the same time. Do any thing but sin, to comply with others for their spiritual edification; and be not too hasty in accounting any thing sinful, wherein the sincere servants of Christ may have sentiments different from yours; rather *suspend* your own practice, than *censure* others’. I would commend

it to you, to love the truth and peace, to love truth more than peace ; but yet to consider, several truths of lesser moment may be waved for peace' sake. For instance: I may part with several things of my own right for peace' sake. Abraham the uncle lets his nephew Lot make that choice which belonged to himself, lest their infidel neighbours should scorn both for their contentions. (Gen. xiii. 8, 9.) The blessed apostle will not insist upon his due maintenance, lest he should hinder the spreading of the gospel. (1 Cor. ix. 12.) This rule is therefore to be observed,—that when two different commands at the same time call for our obedience, we must consider which of them is of greatest moment, not so much in itself, as to that season ; for so a command about the immediate worship of God must give place to a command that concerns but man's bodily relief: "I will have mercy rather than sacrifice." (Matt. ix. 13.) Several good works must be omitted when the doing of them will do more hurt than good. I will close this with that of the apostle, 1 Cor. ix. 19—22: *Though I be free from all men*—Not obliged to any one more than another. *Yet have I made myself servant unto all*—I have complied with the persuasions and inclinations of others in things indifferent. *That I might gain the more*—That I might win them to Christ for their salvation. *Unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews*—That is, to the unbelieving Jews ; I conformed to some of their ceremonies, that I might persuade them to embrace Christianity. *To them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law*—That is, to those believing Jews and Gentiles, who yet think it is necessary to observe the law of Moses ; I comply also with them in some ceremonies which were not yet unlawful. *To them that are without the law, as without law*—That is, to those Gentiles that do not look upon themselves as bound to observe the law of Moses ; among them I use my Christian liberty for the non-observing of days, and meats, &c. *Being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ*—That is, I walk by the rule of the moral law ; and, subjecting myself to all the commands of Christ in the gospel, *To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak*—That is, I condescended to the weak, in teaching them according to their capacity to learn. *I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some*—That is, I accommodate myself to all persons, for the promoting of the gospel.

QUESTION III. "How shall weak Christians, that have but low parts, little grace, few helps, and many hinderances, follow these or such-like directions?"

ANSWER 1. Know this to your comfort, that, though you are such, yet *while you are low in your own esteem, and diligent in the use of what means and helps you have, you stand fair to be as thriving Christians, as rich in grace and comfort, as those [whom] you apprehended far [to] exceed you.*—It is the low valleys that are most fruitful. *God hath chosen the foolish things of the world*—God picks-up those that seem to others to be the refuse of the world. *To confound the wise*—As Christ chose the poor fishermen, to convince

the most knowing part of the world. *God hath chosen the weak things of the world*—Such persons as seem most incapable of understanding the mysteries of the gospel. *To confound the things that are mighty*—To put to silence those that are far above them. *And base things of the world, and things which are despised, God hath chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are*—God, by those who are as contemptible as if they had no being to be taken notice of, manifests the emptiness of those that seem most excellent. (1 Cor. i. 27, 28.) Pray consider: when the whole world was drowned, and when Sodom and the neighbour-cities were burned, there was not one servant saved. But now under the gospel they are in a special manner charged, (and honoured by the charge,) “to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things;” (Titus ii. 10;) and they stand upon even ground, as to spiritual privileges, with any rank of men in the world: “There is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ is all, and in all.” (Col. iii. 11.) It is neither *the Grecians*, being the most learned part of the world; nor *the Jews*, being the only national church in the world; it is neither the observing [of] the ceremonial law; it is not *the Barbarian*, that wants accomplishments; nor *the Scythians*, who are, of all barbarians, most barbarous; it is not *bond*, that is, those who are in the worst of human slavery; nor *free*, that is, those who were never in bondage to any: *But Christ is all, and in all*: That is, He infinitely supplies all outward defects: He is infinitely better to them than all outward privileges: so that you have comparatively nothing else to do but to clear up your union with Jesus Christ.

2. *Practise what you know, though it be never so little; improve what helps you have, though they be never so few; and your graces will grow more than you are aware of.*—“So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how.” (Mark iv. 26, 27.) Those that receive the good seed of the word into good, honest hearts, (or the word hath made them so,) it hath an insensible efficacy, which produceth a gradual increase of grace, even beyond observation. But you complain that you see no such thing. In some respect I may say, The less you take notice of your own graces, the better; provided you do not belie the Spirit of God in overlooking and denying what he hath wrought. Things necessary to salvation are but few, and plain, easy to be (through grace) sufficiently understood and practised. Though there is not any thing so inconsiderable but [it] may exercise the greatest parts and learning attainable in this life; yet there is not any thing necessary to be known, but Jesus Christ, who is our Prophet to teach us, will both give instruction, and capacity to receive it, to all his willing disciples; and Christ will require an account for no more talents than he gives.

3. *Endeavour to make a true observation, how those things which are in their own nature hinderances to the soul, are graciously and*



*powerfully governed by God for our souls' profiting by them.*—That, as the apostle, “I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.” (Phil. i. 12.) When Paul was first taken off from preaching, and cast into prison, who would not at first hearing be ready to cry?—“O, many a poor soul will rue this day! This is the blackest cloud that ever darkened our gospel-day!” The apostle doth as it were tell them, they are greatly mistaken: at present, the fame of his sufferings rung through court, city, and country; and persons were so far from forsaking the truth through discouragement, that they boldly own the gospel: and now was he more at leisure to write those epistles which would benefit the church in future ages. But, to bring this down to ordinary Christians: you know that groundless fears, and trembling misgivings of heart, are the ordinary diseases of a scrupulous conscience; these now dispirit us and hinder us from that cheerful behaviour that might render religion more amiable, and so hinder the spreading of it. And, beside this, Satan, that subtle angler for souls, strikes-in with our spiritual diseases, and plies the soul with next to overwhelming temptations; and he never fails of success through want of skill, or through want of industry. But, blessed be God for overruling all this! God, by but upholding the soul under (not delivering the soul from) its fears, keeps it humble, and makes it more useful, throughout the whole course of its regeneration: and, as for the advantage that Satan takes, God is pleased to give the poor, trembling soul those experiences, that it is our sin not to take notice of them. For instance: That Christian, that is in his own eyes the poorest, weakest, silliest sheep in Christ's fold, shall outwit Satan in all his stratagems, and overpower him in all his assaults, though he knows not how he does it. Thus the poor soul, when he is hard beset, retreats to Christ; and though he dare not call his carriage an acting faith upon Christ, Christ will own it as such, and reward it as such. For how is it that such a poor soul hath held out so many years under its own fears and Satan's temptations, but that Christ upheld both it and its faith? Here is faith not discerned, yet victorious.

4. *Endeavour thankfully and impartially to take notice of the advantages of your condition.*—Do not so much look at what you apprehend more desirable in another's condition, as to know and consider the circumstances of your own condition. Another's condition is better for them: God sees your condition to be better for you; it is the station wherein God sets you: “Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God.” (1 Cor. vii. 24.) Your station in the world is not so high as others', and your distractions in the world are not so great as others'. God hath not set you in his church so high as others; God doth not require so much of you as he doth of others. But, alas! you have not the graces that others have; neither have you the temptations nor desertions that others have. Those who have the largest measure, and the highest degrees, of grace, have always exercises suitable to their receipts; they have sometimes the sorest trials, sometimes the greatest corruptions; and if not that, yet

you will find it is such as Job, and Asaph, and Heman, that make most doleful complaints of the hidings of God's face. Therefore take the apostle's counsel: "Art thou called, being a servant? care not for it." (1 Cor. vii. 21.) As though he had said, Be not troubled at it, as if thy mean condition in the world rendered thee less acceptable unto God. Poor Lazarus is in rich Abraham's bosom. "Hearken, my beloved brethren:" as if he had said, This is a matter worthy your special notice: "Hath not God chosen" (As if he had said, Dare ye deny it?) "the poor of this world," that is, in the things of this world, or in the esteem of this world, "rich in faith?" (James ii. 5;) that is, they have abundance of the grace of faith, and of the privileges of faith; they have no inheritance on earth, but they have at present a title to, and they shall soon have the possession of, the heavenly kingdom.

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## SERMON II.

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WHEREIN, AND WHEREFORE, THE DAMNATION OF THOSE THAT PERISH UNDER THE GOSPEL WILL BE MORE INTOLERABLE THAN THE DAMNATION OF SODOM, OR THE WORST OF THE HEATHENS, AT THE DAY OF JUDGMENT.

*But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.—Matthew xi. 24.*

THE case [which] I am to discourse of this morning, is this: *Wherein, and wherefore, the damnation of those that perish under the gospel will be more intolerable than the damnation of Sodom, or the worst of the Heathens, at the day of judgment.*

We read, in the foregoing chapter, [of] our Saviour giving commission to his twelve disciples, whom he called "apostles;" where we have their commission asserted, instructions about it, and encouragements to the discharge of it.

But by his commission given to them, he did not thereby excuse himself; by his sending them forth to preach and work miracles, he did not forbear and indulge himself: others' labours did not excuse his own. For we read in the first verse of this chapter, "When Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and to preach in their cities." And some of the cities are these, mentioned in this chapter,—Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum; three cities in Galilee. And he begins his speech to them in a way of exprobration: "Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done." (Verse 20.) Whence