

A S E R M O N

CONCERNING

THE CATECHISING OF YOUTH :

PREACHED TO MR. HARRIS'S CATECHUMENS, APRIL 7, 1713.

2 TIMOTHY i. 13.

Hold fast the form of sound words which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.

BLESSED Paul in this, as in the former epistle, giving wholesome advice and instruction to Timothy ; for the enforcing of it, among other things, puts him in mind of his education, and the advantages of it ; the good principles which by it had been instilled into him, and the good practices he had been trained up in : and upon trial, now he came to years of understanding, he could not but see that they were good. Let him therefore adhere to them, and abide by them, and now build upon the foundation then laid.

He particularly mentions the two great advantages which he was blessed with, in his childhood and youth ; that he was bred up, both under the tuition of godly parents, and under the direction and instruction of an able faithful ministry : and both these are requisite to complete the blessings of a religious education.

1. He had been well taught by his godly parents, his grandmother Lois, and his mother Eunice,^a whose unfeigned faith the apostle would have him frequently to think of, and thereby be minded to stir up the gift of God that was in him.^b His father was a Greek, one who had little religion in him, but left it to his mother to bring him up as she thought fit ; and she and his grandmother were not wanting to season the vessel betimes with a good savour ; so that from a child he knew the Holy Scriptures, and was made wise to salvation by them.^c It is a great opportunity, which *mothers* have, and which prudent, pious mothers will improve, to fill the minds of their children, when they are young, with good

knowledge, and to form them to a good disposition. If the tree must be bent, it must be done when it is young and tender, and with a very gentle, easy hand, for the spirit is not to be broken but bowed.

2. He had been well taught by St. Paul too. His mother and grandmother had taught him the Scriptures, and made him ready in them, as a child of God ; then Paul expounded the Scriptures more fully to him, and by the grace of God made him mighty in them, so that he became a man of God, thoroughly furnished to all good works. The text speaks of the form of sound words, which he had heard of Paul, either in private lectures read to him as his pupil, or in his public teaching and catechising, on which Timothy was constantly and diligently attending.

Now those two methods of instruction, both by parents in their families, and by ministers in more public assemblies, are necessary, and do mutually assist each other, and neither will excuse the want of the other. Let not parents think to leave it wholly to ministers ; as if because their children are well taught in public, they need not take any pains with them at home ; no, *there* the foundation must be laid, and there the improvement by public catechising must be examined, and *there* a more particular application must be made according to the children's capacities and dispositions, than it is possible for ministers to make in public. The people of Israel had the Levites dispersed among them, whose office it was to teach them the good knowledge of the Lord ; and yet it is required of parents that they not only receive God's words into their own hearts, but that they teach them diligently to their children, and talk of them in their families, and tell those under their charge the meaning of the testimonies and judgments which he had commanded them.^d If father, or

^a 2 Tim. v. 6.

^b Acts xvi. 1.

^c 2 Tim. iii. 15.

^d Deut. vi. 6, 7, 20.

mother, or both, do not teach their children first, and teach them last too, they will not be fit for, nor much the better by, public catechising.

And on the other hand, let not ministers think to leave it wholly to parents, as if because the children were well taught at home, they needed not to contribute any help of theirs to their instruction. The great Shepherd of the sheep has charged them to feed his lambs* with food proper for them. Besides the natural authority and affection of parents, it is fit that the spiritual authority and affection of ministers likewise, should be improved for the advantage of the rising generation. And it may be presumed, that according to the gift given to them, they have greater abilities for instruction than the parents have. In teaching your children other arts and sciences, though you may have some insight into them yourselves, yet you make use of those who particularly profess those arts and sciences, and make it their business to teach them; and will you not do so in that which is the one thing needful for them to learn well. You are to feed your kids, but you must do it beside the shepherds' tents,¹ under the conduct of a gospel ministry.

Now Timothy having had this double advantage, Paul urges him still to proceed in that good way wherein he had so well set out; to hold fast that form of sound words, which he had received.

(1.) This implies that he had a form of sound words delivered to him by Paul; a brief summary of the Christian doctrine, and of all those things which are most surely believed² among Christians, as St. Luke expresses it; *ὑπογραμμοῖς*—a *delineation*, a *scheme*, or rough draught of the gospel institutes. It is a metaphor taken from painters; in drawing a face, they first draw the shape and lines of it, and then fill it up with proper colours. Such a model or plan of the truths and law of Christ Timothy had, as he might afterwards, in his meditation and preaching, enlarge upon. Whether this form of sound words was a creed, or confession of faith, I cannot say; I rather think it was in the way of a catechism, because that method of instruction was used in the early ages of the church: for we find it alluded to in St. Peter's *ἐκπύρηντα*—the *answer of a good conscience*,³ or rather the *interrogation*; so that I think if we apply it, especially to our catechisms, to the forms of sound words so formed, we shall offer no violence at all in the text.

(2.) Here is a charge to him to *hold it fast, exē—Have it*. Have it by thee, have it with thee, have it in thee, have it always ready for use; do not part with it, nor in any instance depart from it. *Have it*, that is, make it to appear that thou hast it; as to have grace is to have it in action and exercise, and to him who so has, has and uses what he has, shall

be given. Or, as we read it, *Hold it fast*; it was delivered to us, to *have* and to *hold*; and we have it in vain, if we do not hold it.

Accordingly we may hence learn two doctrines.

I. That good catechisms, containing the grounds and principles of the Christian religion, are useful forms of sound words; and it is a great mercy to have heard and learned those forms.

II. Those who have heard and learned the good forms of sound words, must hold them fast in faith and love.

I. It is a very great advantage to young people, to hear and learn the Christian forms of sound words in the days of their youth; to have been well taught some good catechism, or confession of faith. Observe here,

1. The words of the gospel are *ὑγιαίνοντων*—*sound words*, or as some render it, *healthful, wholesome, healing words*. Put both together, and it intimates,

(1.) That there is *value and validity* in the words of the gospel; as there is in that which is sound and firm, and in good condition. They are what they seem, and there is no cheat in them. Try them; and you will find you may trust them, as you may that which is sound, and will never be made ashamed of your confidence in them. *Men* speak with flattering lips and with a double heart; but the words of the Lord are pure words,⁴ and have no mixture of falsehood in them. The law was written in stone, to intimate its stability and perpetuity; and the gospel is no less firm; every iota and tittle of both shall survive heaven and earth.⁵

Assure yourselves, brethren, the words of the gospel which we preach to you, and which you are trained up in the knowledge of, are unchangeable and inviolable. Holy Job's creed concerning his Redeemer, was graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever;⁶ much more is ours so; it is what you may venture your souls and your everlasting welfare upon. That is a sound word, That *Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners*; even the chief.⁷ And that is a sound word, That *God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son*.⁸ It is sound speech that cannot be condemned; for it has been more than a thousand times tried, and it stands firm as the everlasting mountains. *These are the true sayings of God*;⁹ and if we compare the traditions of the elders, or the speculations of the philosophers, with them, we shall say, with the prophet, *What is the chaff to the wheat?*¹⁰

(2.) That there is virtue to be drawn from them for *healing and health* to us. They are not only clear from every thing that is hurtful and unwholesome, but there is that, in them, which is medicinal and restorative, not only of health and strength, but of

* John xxi. 15.
† 1 Pet. iii. 21.

† Cant. i. 8.
‡ Pa. xii. 2.

§ Luke i. 1.
|| Matt. v. 18.

1 Job xix. 24, 25.
2 Rev. xix. 9.

3 1 Tim. i. 15.

4 1 Pet. v. 11.
5 Jer. xxiii. 28.

life itself. These waters of the sanctuary,⁴ these leaves of the tree of life, are healing to the nations.⁵ These words, if duly applied and mixed with faith, restore the soul, and put it in frame, heal its maladies, and reduce to a just temper its distempered and disordered powers. It was said of old concerning those who were sick, that God sent his word and healed them.⁶ And when Christ was here upon earth, it was by the power of his word that he healed all who had need of healing, and in a sense of their need applied themselves to him for it. And this was a figure of the efficacy of the word of the gospel for the healing of diseased souls, a divine power going along with it; and in it the Sun of Righteousness arises in the soul, as it did in the world, with healing under his wings.⁷

Let this therefore recommend to you the words we teach you, that they are not only of inestimable value in themselves, but will be of unspeakable advantage to you. They are healing words indeed; for they are regenerating and recreating words, whereby you may be saved.⁸ Mix faith with them, and you will experience the power of them, setting you to rights, and giving you a new life and vigour. They are therefore not only faithful sayings, but well worthy of all acceptance, of *your* acceptance. Accept them therefore, and receive the benefit of them, that you receive not God's grace in vain: and if they be in vain, and you be not healed by them, the fault is in yourselves.

2. It is good to have forms of these sound words drawn up for the use of those who are to learn the first principles of the oracles of God;⁹ not to be imposed as of equal authority with the Scriptures, but to be proposed in order to the further study of the Scriptures.

Bear us witness, we set up no other rule of faith and practice, no other oracle, no other touchstone or test of orthodoxy, but the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament: these only are the fountains whence we fetch our knowledge; these only the foundations on which we build our faith and hope; these the *dernier resort* of all our inquiries and appeals in the things of God, for they only are given by divine inspiration. This is the principle we abide by, *To the law and to the testimony*;¹⁰ that is the *regula regulans*—the *paramount rule*, and far be it from us that we should set up any form of words in competition with it, much less in contradiction to it; or admit any rival with it in the conduct and guardianship of our souls, as some do the traditions of the church, and others, I know not what light within. Every other help we have for our souls we make use of as *regula regulata*—a *rule controlled*, in subordination and subserviency to the Scripture; and among the rest our catechisms and confessions of faith.

Give me leave to illustrate this by an appeal to the gentlemen of the long robe. They know very well that the common law of England lies in the *Year Book*, and *books of reports*, in the *records of immemorial customs*, and in *cases occasionally adjudged*: which are not an artificial system drawn up by the rules of method, but rather historical collections of what was solemnly discussed, and judiciously delivered, in several reigns, *pro ne natâ—as occasions have arisen*, and always taken for law; and according to which the practice has always been; (with which, if I may be allowed to compare that which, infinitely more sacred and inviolable, cannot be altered or amended by any wisdom or power on earth;) such are the books of the Scripture, histories of the several ages of the church, (as those of the several reigns of the kings,) and of the discoveries of God's mind and will in every age, as there was occasion; and these, too, built upon ancient principles, received and submitted to before these divine annals began to be written.

But though *those* are the fountains and foundations of the law, those gentlemen know that *institutes and abridgments, collections of, and references to, the cases adjudged in the books*, are of great use to them, to prepare them for the study of the originals, and to assist them in the application of them, but are not thought to derogate from the authority and honour of them. Such we reckon our forms of sound words to be; if in any thing they mistake the sense of the text, or misapply it, they must be corrected by it; but as far as they agree with it, they are of great use to make it more easy and ready to us.

That which is intended in these forms of sound words, is, not like the council of Trent, to make a new creed, and add it to what we have in the Scripture; but to collect and arrange the truths and laws of God, and to make them familiar.

(1.) By these forms of sound words, the main principles of Christianity, which lie scattered in the Scripture, are collected and brought together. We know that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable, and that there is no idle word in God's book, nothing that is unnecessary; but we know that all is not alike profitable, or alike necessary. Every line in a well drawn picture is of use, and answers some end; but every line is not alike serviceable to the main design of the picture, which is to represent the face of the person whose picture it is, yet we must not say therefore, that it might as well have been spared. The Scripture gives us the things of God in their native purity and plainness, yet not without their proper illustrations. It is *naked TRUTH*, that is, without disguise, and the ambiguity which Apollo's oracles were noted for, but not *NAKED truth*, without dress and ornament.

Now our catechisms and confessions of faith pick

⁴ Ezek. xlvii. 8, 9. ⁵ Rev. xxii. 2. ⁶ Ps. cvii. 20. ⁷ Mal. iv. 2.

⁸ Acts xi. 14. ⁹ Heb. v. 12. ¹⁰ Heb. vi. 1. ¹¹ Isa. viii. 20.

up from the several parts of holy writ, those passages, which though, perhaps, occasionally delivered, contain the essentials of religion, the foundations and main pillars upon which Christianity is built; which we are concerned rightly to understand, and firmly to believe, in the first place, and, then, to go on to perfection. We cannot contain all the Scripture; but there are some more weighty and comprehensive sayings, which (like those which the Jews wrote in their phylacteries) we should bind, for a sign, upon our hand, and which should be as frontlets between our eyes.* And our forms of sound words furnish us with these.

(2.) By these, the truths of God are arranged and put in order. The several books of Scripture are written in an excellent method, according as the particular nature and intention of them is, and they are put together in an admirable good order: but when out of them the *main principles* of religion are to be gathered, it is necessary that they be put into some method proper to serve the design of representing them at one view, that we may understand them the more distinctly, by observing their mutual references to each other, their connexion with, and dependence upon, each other; and thereby they appear in their truer light, and fuller lustre.

These forms of sound words show us the order that is in God's words, as well as in his works; the harmony of divine truths, how one thing tends to another, and all centre in Christ, and the glory of God in Christ: and thus, like the stones in an arch, they mutually support, and strengthen, and fix one another. They are as a map of the land of promise, by the help of which we may travel it over with our eye in a little time, and know the true situation of every tribe, though we cannot give a particular description of every part of its inheritance.

(3.) By these, the truths of God are brought down to the capacity of young ones, and those who are as yet but weak in understanding. Not that God has *spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth*;† no, *the words of wisdom's mouth are all plain to him that understandeth*.‡ But to those who are yet babes they need to be explained; to them we must *give the sense, and cause them to understand the reading*;§ and this is in part done by those forms of sound words, which lead us by the hand as it were into the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus. Not that we need to seek other words than those which the Holy Ghost teaches; they are the most proper vehicle of the things which are *given us of God to know*,^b and it is unsafe to depart from them. Many, under pretence of refining upon the Scripture, and expressing the things contained in it more philosophically, have but darkened counsel by words without knowledge:¶ the faithful servant will deliver his message as near

as he can in his master's own words; *Go* (says God to Ezekiel) *get thee to the house of Israel*; and do not only speak my words, but *speak with my words to them*.^d

But spiritual things must be compared with spiritual, and by the plainer parts of Scripture, those must be explained that are more dark and hard to be understood; and this is done by our *forms of sound words*, which make the principles of religion to be as milk for babes, who as yet cannot bear strong meat.^e The ten commandments are a divine form of sound words to direct our *practice*, but they are short and exceeding comprehensive; it is therefore necessary that we be taught from other Scriptures, what each commandment requires and forbids. The Lord's prayer is another divine form of sound words to direct our *petitions*; but that also is short and comprehensive, and it is requisite we should be taught from other Scriptures, what we pray for in each petition. The form of baptism is another divine form of sound words, peculiar to the Christian dispensation; but that also needs to be explained by other Scriptures, as it is excellently well in the ancient creeds; which we receive and embrace, and greatly rejoice in, as standing, lasting testimonies to the faith once delivered to the saints,^f which, by the grace of God, we will not only adhere to, but earnestly contend for, and live and die by. And all these divine forms of sound words you have fully and faithfully set before you, and opened to you, in the Assembly's Larger and Shorter Catechism; as, blessed be God, they are in many other, both in our own and other reformed churches.

3. Those are happy who are well taught, and have well learned, those forms of sound words when they are young. It is a great privilege, and a very improving one, to be betimes instructed in the principles of religion, and to have the truths of Christ instilled into us in the days of our youth, and to be trained up in an acquaintance and converse with them from the first; by the care of godly parents especially, who have many advantages in dealing with children which ministers cannot have, to be put betimes upon reading the Scriptures, and getting portions of it by heart; remembering and repeating sermons; to be taught the catechism, and examined in it, and not only made to *say* it, but made, as we are capable, to *understand* it, and taught to *prove* it by Scripture, and give a reason for it; to be directed to pray, and obliged to do it; and to a strict observation of the Lord's day, in order to all this. And if to all this be added *ministerial catechising*, the more copious and accurate explication of the mysteries of God by the appointed stewards of those mysteries, it consummates the happiness of a religious education, from which abundant advantages may be reaped, if it be wisely and faithfully improved.

* Deut. vi. 8. y Isa. xiv. 19. z Prov. viii. 9.
 † Neh. viii. 8. b 1 Cor. ii. 13.

c Job xxxviii. 2.
 e Heb. v. 12.

d Ezek. iii. 4.
 f Jude 3.

I know I speak to *those* who enjoy this privilege, on whom the doctrine of Christ not only comes down in *showers*, in the preaching of the word, but on whom it *distils* more slowly and softly, *as the dew, and as the small rain upon the tender herb,*^g in catechising. And I commend your pious zeal in coveting and seeking instruction this way. Go on, and prosper, the Lord is with you while you be with him: and I hope it is a token for good, and will prove so, that God has mercy in store for the next generation,—that there are so many young people among us who are *asking their way to Zion*, and desire to be told it, *with their faces thitherward. Who hath begotten us these?*^h

I know also there *are* many, and many there *have been*, who were blest with a religious education when they were young, and were then trained up in the way in which they should go, who have afterwards turned aside from the holy commandment; who though they were not *born of fornication*, but were the *seed of the faithful*, yet have proved an unfaithful seed, and have themselves *gone a whoring from their God*. This should not discourage parents and ministers from doing their duty, in catechising youth, but should direct them to look up to God for his grace, without which all our care and pains is fruitless, and we do but beat the air; and should engage *you who are catechised* to be jealous over yourselves, with a godly jealousy, that you may not be conceited of yourselves, or confident in yourselves, may not be *high-minded*, but may always *fear* lest you *seem to come short* of that which is expected from you, or seem to fall off to any evil work or way, and though now you think you stand, may always take heed lest you fall.

But I know that your being thus catechised, if you improve it aright, and be not wanting to yourselves, will be of unspeakable advantage to you; and I hope to be of use, both to direct you and to encourage you, if I tell you how and which way it may be made so.

(1.) Hereby *you are, for some time, well employed now you are young*. Childhood and youth, upon this account, (among others,) are vanity,ⁱ that so much of the time is then spent to so little purpose, and yet better than, as it is afterwards spent by many, to evil purposes. But your being catechised obliges you to spend at least some part of your time well, and so as you may afterwards reflect upon it with comfort and satisfaction above many other, perhaps above any other, of your precious moments. If the time which children and young people would, *otherwise*, spend in sport and recreation, (they call it *PAS[s]-TIME*, when we have more need of *STAY*-times than pastimes, for it passes away fast enough of itself,) is thus happily retrieved, and is spent in

good exercises; in conversing with the word of God; (which we should be meditating in day and night,) in reviewing and repeating to ourselves the things of God; we cannot but say that it is a kindness to us, and much greater than it would be, to keep a man from spending an estate wastefully, and put him into a way of getting an estate easily and honourably. Whatever goes with the rest of your time, here is a portion of it spent so as to turn to a good account, and so as you may meet it again with comfort on the other side death and the grave.

Those who are catechised either by their parents or ministers on the *evening* of the Lord's day, have a particular advantage therein: that those precious minutes, (and one minute of sabbath time is worth three of any other day,) which so many young people idle away in foreign, foolish talk, either in the fields, or at the doors of their houses, (which corrupts the mind and manners, and dispels what they had gained, if they had gained any thing, in and by the duties of the day,) they spend in that which serves such good purposes, and will help to clench the nail that has been driven, that it may be a *nail in a sure place*. I know not how young people can be trained up to a better piece of good husbandry, than to a good husbandry of time, especially sabbath time.

(2.) Hereby you will *become better able to understand the word preached, and more capable of profiting by it*, and so it will be a great advantage to you. I am sure it is the duty of ministers to preach the word, and therein to be constant, to be instant in season and out of season, they have [2 Tim. iv. 1, 2.] received a solemn charge to do so; and if so, either you must hear, or they must preach to the walls. And I am sure you are concerned to hear, so that your souls may live; and therefore to take heed how you hear, and, in order to your profiting, to hear with understanding. The *highway* ground in our Saviour's parable, represents those who hear the words of the kingdom, and understand it not;^k for it is not ploughed up and prepared to receive it; they are not instructed in the things that are spoken of, and therefore such *asspeak* to them of those things are *barbarians*. They who are not catechised, not taught the forms of sound words, apprehend not what we mean when we speak of their misery by nature, the sinfulness of sin, the mediation of Christ, the operations of the Spirit, and the great things of the other world; we had as good talk Greek to them: they are ready to say of us, as the people did of Ezekiel's preaching, *Doth he not speak parables?*^l

But you who are catechised understand our dialect, are acquainted with Scripture language; for you are accustomed to it, and can say, "This good word is the confirmation, and that the illustration, and the other the application, of what we have many

^g Deut. xxxii. 2.

^h Jer. i. 5.

ⁱ Eccl. xi. 10.

^k Matt. xiii. 19.

^l Ezek. xx. 49.

a time heard, and knew before, but thus are made to know better. And therefore though those who have not been catechized do most *need* instruction, by the preaching of the word; (and for their sakes we must many a time stay to explain things which are most plain, wherein they who are strong ought to bear with us, in compassion to the infirmities of the weak;) yet those who have been well catechised do most *desire* it, and delight in it, and edify by it, because they understand it. Catechising does to the preaching of the word the same good office that John Baptist did to our Saviour; it prepares its way, and makes its paths straight, and yet like him does but say the same things: "*Repent with an eye to the kingdom of heaven.*"

(3.) Hereby *you will have a foundation laid for a good work of grace in your souls.* It is true, that God in his favours to us, and his operations on us, acts as a God, with an incontestable sovereignty, and an irresistible power; but it is as true that he deals with men as men, as reasonable creatures, in a waysuited to their nature, he draws with the cords of a man;^a he gains possession of the will and affections by opening the understanding, informing the judgment, and rectifying its mistakes. And this is entering into the soul, as the good Shepherd, whose own the sheep are, enters into the sheepfold by the door;^b whereas Satan debauches the affections, and so perverts the will, and bribes and blinds the understanding, which is climbing up another way, for he is a thief and a robber. Christ opens the understanding, and so makes the heart to burn; opens men's eyes, and causes the scales to fall from them; and so turns men from Satan to God.

Now though Christ can give an understanding immediately, as to Paul; yet ordinarily he enlightens it, in the use of means, and gives a knowledge of divine things, by the instructions of parents and ministers; and afterwards by his Spirit and grace brings them home to the mind and conscience, delivers the soul into the mould of them, and by them works a saving change in it. It was the prerogative of an *apostle* to come to the knowledge of the gospel, not by man, nor to be taught fit, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ;^c *we* must come to the knowledge of it, in the way of instituted ordinances; and none more likely to prepare for the particular applications of divine grace, than this particular application of good instruction by catechizing.

(4.) Hereby *you will be armed against the assaults and insinuations of seducers,* and such as lie in wait to deceive, and draw you aside into the paths of error. Satan is a roaring lion, who seeks in this way to devour souls; and none are such an easy prey to him as those who are ignorant and unskilful in the word of righteousness. But those who

are well instructed in the forms of sound words, and understand the evidence of divine truths, are aware of the fallacies with which others are beguiled, and know how to detect and escape them, for surely *in vain* is the net spread in the sight of any bird. They who grow in the knowledge of Christ, will not be visibly led away by the error of the wicked, so as to fall from their own steadfastness;^d those who are thus established when they are children, will not be always *children, tossed about with every wind of doctrine.*^e

Those who are well catechised, are well fortified against temptations to atheism and infidelity, which, under pretence of *FREE-thinking*, invite men to *FALSE* and *FOOLISH-thinking*; and by *debauching their principles*, corrupt their morals: and which, under pretence of a *FREE conversation*, allure to *VICE* and *IMMORALITY*, enslave the soul to the most brutish lusts, and by *corrupting the morals*, debauch the principles. It will likewise be an excellent antidote against the poison of popery; a national zeal against which is, then, likely to be an effectual defence of the protestant religion, when it is a zeal according to knowledge. A right understanding of the *offices* and *ordinances* of Christ, the former of which are daringly usurped, and the latter wickedly corrupted and profaned, in the church of Rome, will, by the blessing of God, preserve us from going in with those strong delusions, though the temptation should be ever so strong, and prepare us to suffer, rather than to sin, if we should be called out to it.

(5.) Hereby *you will be furnished for doing good to others,* in the places where God has set you. Your being well instructed in the forms of sound words, will qualify you to be useful in your generation, for the glory of God, and the edification of many; which will be your honour and comfort now, and will add to your crown hereafter. Out of a good treasure of Christian knowledge well laid up when you are young, you will be able, like the good householder, to *bring forth things new and old;*^f as there is occasion, for the entertainment and benefit of others. *Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth will speak.* Hereby you will be able to resist and oppose that evil communication which corrupts good manners, and to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men; and not only so, but to advance and keep up that communication which is good, and to the use of edifying,^g which may manifest grace in your hearts, and minister grace to the hearers. These forms of sound words will teach you that sound spirit which cannot be condemned.^h And thus your lips will feed many.

It will be likewise of great use to you in prayer; both in secret, and with your families, when God calls you to the charge of families. With what

^a Hos. xi. 4. ^b John x. 1, 2. ^c Gal. i. 12. ^d 2 Pet. iii. 17.

^e Eph. iv. 14. ^f Matt. xiii. 52. ^g Eph. iv. 29. ^h Tit. ii. 8.

solid judgment, exact method, aptness, and great variety of expression, have I heard private Christians, who have been well instructed in the things of God, and conversant with the Scripture, offer up their prayers and supplications to God, without the help of any other forms, but those forms of sound words; and this with such undissembled indications of pious affection, as has been very proper to kindle and excite, to raise and carry on, the devotions of those who joined with them. I believe some who are pleased to be severe, in their reflections upon all *extemporary prayer*, as we call it, would not be so, if they knew *this* so well as I have done.

(6.) Hereby, *those who have a good work of grace begun in them, will be greatly assisted in the progress of it.* Timothy, by the help of these forms of sound words, is nourished up in faith and good doctrine, whereunto he has attained.* They who have pure hearts and clean hands, hereby shall become stronger and stronger' in judgment, in affection, and in resolution. The more firmly the foundation is laid, the broader and the higher the building may be carried. And the better we understand the road we are to travel, the better we shall get forward in our journey. Affectionate Christians who are weak in knowledge, have but the wings of a dove that flies low; but knowing Christians are carried on as upon eagles' wings, with which they mount up for the prize of the high calling,—they run and are not weary.

And those who have themselves some good measures of knowledge and grace, may be greatly improved in both, by attending upon public catechising; and if young, by bearing a part in it. Apollos was an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures; and he was instructed in the way of the Lord," *κατηχημένος*—*he was catechised*, so the word is: and he was fervent in spirit, yet he was still willing to learn, and found advantage by it; for there were those who took him, and expounded to him the way of God more perfectly. Those who think they understand the way of God pretty well, yet should still be *increasing with the increase of God*, should not think they have already attained, or are already perfect, but should be pressing forward, and covet to understand the way of God more perfectly.

(7.) Hereby you will *have your memories well stored* for your own use, and will have always good matter ready at hand for pious thoughts and meditations. It is certainly as much the benefit, as it is the duty, of Christians, to converse much in their hearts with the things of God. It is the character of the blessed man, and an evidence of his delighting in the law of God after the inner man, that *in that law he meditates day and night.** *O how do I love it!* says David, *it is my meditation all the day;** it is the subject,

not only of my frequent, but of my fixed, thoughts: not now and then, upon an occasion, but constantly. And if David could find such employment and entertainment for his thoughts from morning till night in the law of God, much more may we find satisfaction in it, and the gospel of Christ too, which so far excels it.

Now one reason why this duty of meditation is so much neglected, is, because people want matter for their thoughts to enlarge and expatiate upon; and the reason of that is, because they were never enriched, as they should have been, in all knowledge;* their stock is soon exhausted, and they know not what to think of next. But if you get an abundance of good knowledge, you will never have to seek for something proper and useful to entertain yourselves with. You soon forget the sermons you hear; but if your catechism was well learned, and the *proofs* of it, you can never forget *them*; so that you may at any time take an answer of your catechism, and dwell upon that in your thoughts, till your hearts burn within you.

(8.) Hereby you will be *enabled to transmit, pure and entire, to those who come after you, that good thing which is committed to you.* The truths and ordinances of Christ are a sacred deposit, a trust handed down to us by our believing predecessors, and lodged in our hands, to be carefully kept in our day, and faithfully transferred to the generations to come: but how can we do that, if we be not ourselves both rightly and fully apprized of it. We are false to this trust, not only if we *betray* it, by the admission of heresy and idolatry; but if we *lose* it, and let it drop, by ignorance and carelessness, and unacquaintedness with, and indifference to, the interests of Christianity.

We of this age cannot *otherwise* repay what we received from those who went before us, than by consigning the value received to those who come after us; nor make any other requital to our parents, for giving us a good education, but by giving the like to our children; which, therefore, with the utmost care and pains we should *qualify* ourselves to do, and then *make conscience* of doing. And those who have not children of their own, ought to do it for the children of their relations, and the children of the poor, and to promote public catechisings and charity schools; and thus contribute what they can to the raising up of a seed to serve Christ, which shall be accounted to him for a generation, that thus the name of Christ may endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven. What has been told to us of the wondrous works of God, we must tell to our children, that they may tell them to their children, that those who *shall be created* may praise the Lord.*

II. Those who have the *privilege* to hear and learn the forms of sound words, with it have a *charge*.—To hold them fast in faith and love, which is in Christ Jesus.

This implies that you are in danger of losing them, and being robbed of them, through your own negligence of having them snatched out of your hands by your spiritual enemies, or drop through your fingers if you do not hold them fast. Satan is that wicked one who steals the word of God out of the hearts of the careless hearers and learners; as the fowls of the air do the seed from the highway ground,^b that it could not have any root in. Many have had the form of sound words, and with it a form of godliness, and a name to live; but have let them go, and lost them; have made shipwreck of the faith, and of their own souls. Let their falls be warnings to us, and let us therefore fear *lest we also come short*, or so much as *seem to come short*.

I know I speak to those who have the form of sound words, who have *hold of it*. In God's name therefore I charge you to *hold it fast*, to keep your hold of it, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.

1. You must hold it fast, that is, you must retain the remembrance of it; keep it in mind and memory; you have it, see that you always have it, that you have it ready for your use upon all occasions. Great stress is laid upon this: the gospel is that by which we are saved, if we keep in memory what has been preached unto us.^c Not as if the bare remembering and being able to recite these sound words, and the forms of them, were sufficient to save us; they do not heal as charms and spells pretend to do, merely by the repeating or writing of them; a man may be able to say all the Bible over by heart, and yet come short of grace and glory; but the remembering of these things is necessary to our due improvement of them, and to the other duties required of us: if we so remember the covenant as to be ever mindful of it; if we remember his commandments to do them,^d we remember them aright.

(1.) It will be of good use to you, to retain the words you now learn and hear; and in order to that, frequently to review them, to catechise yourselves, and repeat them over to yourselves. What you said to your parents perhaps by rote, when you were children, and not yet capable of knowing the intent and extent of, you should now say to yourselves, with understanding, and judgment, and affection. Let not the wisest and best be ashamed to repeat the words of their catechism, as they have occasion to quote them; but let them rather be ashamed who cannot do it; who can remember, all their days, the idle foolish stories and songs they learned when they were young, but forget the forms of those words whereby they must be saved, and must be judged.

(2.) It is of absolute necessity that you retain the remembrance of the *things*, so as to have them ready for use, though it be in your own words. It is necessary that you should be well acquainted with the mystery of the gospel; with your need of a Saviour; with the method in which the salvation was wrought out by the Son of God, and is applied by the Spirit of God; with the breadth of the commandment, and with the strictness and spiritual nature of it; with the tenor of the new covenant, and the precious privileges of it; and with the great truths concerning the upper and future world: in these things you have been instructed; and are concerned to give the more earnest heed to the things you have heard, lest at any time you let them slip.^e Consider,

[1.] They are things worth remembering; of inestimable value in themselves, and of vast importance and concern to us; in comparison with which, abundance of other things which we fill our memories with, are but toys and trash. How many things do we retain the remembrance of, which tend to defile our minds, or to disquiet them, which we would *willingly forget* if we could; and how many more are we *industrious to keep in memory*, which serve only to the carrying on of our business in the world: whilst THAT is seldom or never seriously thought of, and so comes by degrees to be in a manner forgotten, WHICH BELONGS TO OUR PEACE, our everlasting peace; and justly may that be hid from our eyes,^f which we thus hide our eyes from. The reason Moses gives to Israel, why they should set their hearts to all the words he testified to them, will hold more strongly, why we should treasure up Christ's word in our heart, and let it dwell in us richly, that *It is not a vain thing for us, but it is our life*,^g and the lives of our souls depend upon it.

[2.] The remembrance of them will be of very great and good use to us daily; both to *fortify us against every evil word and work*, by suggesting to us the most powerful arguments against sin, and the most pertinent answers to the temptations of Satan; and to *furnish us for every good word and work*, by suggesting to us the wisest directions, and the sweetest encouragements, in doing our duty. If we hold fast these forms of sound words as we ought, our mouth, like that of the righteous, *shall speak wisdom*, and our tongue shall be able to *talk of judgment*. And if thus the law of our God be in our heart, none of our steps shall slide. Solomon for this reason writes to us excellent things in counsel and knowledge, *that we may answer the words of truth to those that send to us*; ^h or, as the margin reads it, *to those that send us*, to God, who sent us into the world to do all the good we can in it.

[3.] It was for this end that we have heard and learned them, *that we might lay them up in our hearts*,

^b Matt. xiii. 19. ^c 1 Cor. xv. 1, 2. ^d 1 Chron. xvi. 15. ^e Heb. ii. 1.

^f Luke xix. 41. ^g Deut. xxxii. 46, 47. ^h Prov. xxii. 20, 21.

in order to their being of use to us hereafter ; so that we receive the grace of God therein in vain, if we do not retain them. They are not intended merely for your present exercise and entertainment, as a task upon you to keep you employed, much less as an amusement to keep up in you a reverence for your parents and teachers ; but they were intended to fit you for the service of God in this world, and the vision and fruition of him in a better world. You learn your catechism, not as you who were designed for tradesmen learned Latin and Greek, when you went to school, it may be, with design to forget it, because you had a notion you should never have occasion for it in your business ; but as you learned to write and cast accounts, with design to retain it, because you were told you would have use for it daily in carrying on your trade. You are taught now, that you may, as long as you live, live according to what you are taught.

[4.] You will be called to an account shortly for these, as well as other your advantages ; and therefore are concerned to improve them, so that you may give up your account with joy, such joy as shall be an earnest of that *joy of our Lord*, into which *good and faithful servants*, who have diligently and faithfully improved their talents, shall enter, and in which they shall be for ever happy. For your having heard and learned these things, will but aggravate your condemnation if you do not hold them fast. You know what was Chorazin's doom, and Bethsaida's, and Capernaum's ; tremble lest it should be yours. It is an awful thought which I have somewhere met with, " That the professors of this age, in which there is such plenty of the means of knowledge and grace, whether they go to heaven, or hell, will be the greatest debtors in either of these places : if to heaven, the greatest debtors to divine mercy and grace for those improved means that helped to bring them thither ; if to hell, the greatest debtors to divine justice for those abused means that would have helped to keep them thence."

Let not what I have said of the necessity of remembering the sound words we hear, be a discouragement to any serious, conscientious Christians, who have honest and good hearts, but weak and treacherous memories ; nor make the righteous sad, who ought not to be made sad. You who tremble at God's word, do really get good by it, though you cannot recollect the method and language in which it is delivered you. If you live in the fear of God, and in a course of holy watchfulness against sin, and diligence in duty, you retain the impressions of the word, though you cannot retain the expressions of it. I have been told of a good man, who was much affected with a sermon he heard concerning, as it would appear, the vanity of the world ; and

commending it afterwards to a friend, was desired to give some account of the sermon : " Truly," says he, " I cannot remember any thing of it, but I am resolved, by the grace of God, I will never set my heart so much upon this world as I have done." " Why then," (says his friend) " thou rememberest all." David will never forget God's precepts, for (says he) *By them thou hast quickened me.*¹ If we find our hearts quickened by the word, we do not forget it ; and it is to be hoped we will not, we shall not, forget it. Put a sieve that is dirty into the water, and though when you take it out it carries away little or nothing of the water with it, yet it is washed and made clean. Though we cannot repeat the good sermons we have heard ; yet if, through grace, our hearts and ways are purified by them, they are not lost.

But let what I have said engage you who hear and learn the forms of sound words, to hold them fast, to imprint them in your minds and memories, that you may have them ready to you at all times, as occasion requires. In order to this, labour to understand them ; and let your knowledge be clear and distinct, and then you will be likely to retain it ; set every truth in its proper place, and then you will know where to find it ; set it in its true light, and then you will know what use to make of it. Get your hearts duly affected with divine things, and abide and act under the power and influence of them ; and then you will remember them. Be often repeating them to yourselves : the Virgin Mary kept the sayings of Christ, by *pondering them in her heart.*²

2. You must hold it fast in faith. It is not enough to remember the good truths that are taught you ; but you must mix them with faith,¹ or they will not profit you. You let them go, though you remember them ever so well, if you let go the belief of them, and the profession of your faith concerning them : it is by a hand of faith that you take hold of them, and keep hold.

You must hold them fast in faith, that is,

(1.) You must give a firm assent to them as faithful sayings ; must set to your seal that God is true. And every word of his is so, even that which you cannot comprehend the mystery of, as the eternity of God, the immensity of all his perfections, the Trinity, the incarnation of the Son of God, the operations of the Spirit upon the soul of man, and the like ; yet because they are things which God has revealed, you must subscribe to the truth of : if you do not, you make God a liar ; and do in effect make yourselves wiser than God, when you say, *How can this be ?* Whereas you should say, *Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief.*

(2.) You must grow up to a full assurance of the

¹ Ps. cxix. 93.

² Luke ii. 19.

¹ Heb. iv. 2.

undeniable truth, and incontestable evidence, of these sound words. Pass on toward perfection; acquaint yourselves with the *Confirming Catechism*; know not only *what* it is we believe, but *why* we believe it; and be ready always to give a reason of the hope that is in you.^m Solomon had this view in instructing his son; *That I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth;*ⁿ that thou mayst be convinced that they are words of truth, and receive them accordingly. And Luke the evangelist had the same design in writing his gospel, and inscribing it to his friend Theophilus, who, probably, had been his pupil; *That thou mightest know the certainty of those things wherein thou hast been instructed;*^o this is holding it fast in faith.

(3.) You must make a faithful application of these sound and healing words to yourselves; else they will not answer the end, or be healing to you, any more than food not eaten, physic not taken, or a plaster not applied. Of the word of Christ you must say, not only, "This is true," but, "This is true concerning me:" *He loved me, and gave himself for me*; to save me, not in my sins, but from them; and to purify me to himself, and make me zealous of good works. Hear it, and know it, for thy good,^p says Eliphaz to Job, *for thyself*, so it is in the margin. Then only we know it for our good, when we know it for ourselves.

3. You must hold it fast in love; that is the other arm with which these forms of sound words must be embraced, and held, that we may not let them go.

(1.) You must take delight in them, and in the knowledge of them: that which we love we will hold fast, and not easily part with. It is not enough for us to know the truth, but we must love it; not enough that we receive it as a faithful saying, but also as well worthy of all acceptation; we must not only give it credit as true news, but bid it welcome as good news, and rejoice in it; and when Christ says, *Surely, I come quickly, we must not only say, "Even so, so it is, he will come," but Amen, so be it; come, Lord Jesus.*^q This wisdom, this knowledge, must so enter into thy heart, as to become pleasant to thy soul.^r They say it was a ceremony used of old by the Jews, when they sent their children to school, they gave them a piece of a honeycomb to eat, repeating those words of Solomon, *My son, eat thou honey because it is good, and the honeycomb, which is sweet to thy taste; so shall the knowledge of wisdom be unto thy soul, when thou hast found it.*^s And that which is not thus delighted in, will not be long held fast.

(2.) You must be affected with them, and lay them to heart, as things that concern you to the last degree. Love is the leading affection, and rules the rest; as that goes, all the rest move. Be affected

with love to the good word of God; and then you will conceive a high value and veneration for Christ, and a rooted antipathy to sin; a holy contempt of the world, a deep concern for your own souls, and a care about your everlasting state; and all other good affections, that will be the principles of a steady and regular motion of the soul heaven-wards. And then you will hold fast this form of sound words, when it makes such impressions as those upon you, and (as Christ's sayings ought to do) sinks down into your hearts,^t and impresses a weight and stamp upon them.

3. You must be influenced by them, and act under the commanding power of them. That *love* in which the sound words must be held fast, is here put for all that *evangelical obedience* which holy love is the principle of; for, as faith works by love, so love works by keeping the commandments of God;^u for *This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous.* We then hold fast the sayings of Christ, when we hold to them, in the constant temper of our minds, and tenor of our lives, and govern ourselves by them in all we say or do, that we may *thus* adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour.

4. There is one word more in the text to be touched upon, and it is the centre and crown of all: This faith and love must be in Christ Jesus. Blessed Paul, full of blessed Jesus, breathes nothing so much as Christ; he is his Alpha and Omega, and must be ours; it is the token in every epistle. We must hold fast the sound words of the gospel, in that faith and love which has Christ for its author, its object, and its end.

(1.) Which has Christ for its *author*; that faith and love which is wrought in us, not by the strength of any natural reasonings or resolutions of our own, but by the Spirit and grace of Christ, darting rays of divine light into the understanding, and striking sparks of divine fire into the affections, for these are *not of ourselves*, they are the *gift of God*. Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus;^v for on him is our help laid, and in him only is our help found. Depend not upon any ability of your own, lean not to your own understanding, but go forth and go on, take hold and keep hold, in Christ's strength.

(2.) Which has Christ for its *object*; that faith and love in which the truths of the gospel must be held fast, as it must flow from Christ, so it must fasten on him. It is Christ in the gospel that we must embrace, and hold fast; who is the true treasure hid in that field, which we must think it worth while to part with all we have for the purchase of. It is by faith in Christ, and love to Christ, that we must hold fast what we have received. For this

^m 1 Pet. iii. 15.
^p Job v. 27.

ⁿ Prov. xxii. 21.

^o Luke i. 4.

^q Rev. xxii. 20.

^r Prov. ii. 10.

^s 1 John v. 3.

^t Prov. xxiv. 13, 14.

^u Luke ix. 44.

^v 2 Tim. ij. 1.

reason we must embrace these sound words, because we find so much of Christ in them. He is that golden thread that runs through the web of the whole gospel. St. Austin somewhere says of himself, that before his conversion he took great delight in reading the writings of Tully, the Roman orator, but now (says he) I cannot relish them at all, as I used to do, because I find nothing of Christ in them.

(3.) Which has Christ for its end. It must be that faith and love *which has an eye to Christ*; which has this always in view, *to glorify Christ, and to be glorified with Christ*: that *faith* which presses toward its own perfection, in the immediate sight of Christ; and that *love* which presses toward its own perfection, in the everlasting enjoyment of him.

APPLICATION.

Let me now close with a few words of exhortation, in reference to the form of sound words.

1. Let us bless God, that our lot is cast in a land of light; that he who determines the times before appointed, and the bounds of men's habitations, has determined ours so well, and so much to our advantage; that those statutes and judgments, which the heathen have not known, are revealed to us. We can never be enough thankful to God for this distinguishing favour, his manifesting himself to us, so as not unto the world. *Blessed are our eyes, for they see the joyful light, and our ears, for they hear the joyful sound, which many prophets and kings desired to see, desired to hear, and might not.* We can never be enough thankful to God for it, that living in a *Christian nation* we have Bibles; in a *protestant nation*, we have them in a language we understand; that to us are committed the oracles of God,^a *the lively oracles*, with more advantage than to the Jews of old; that with us are the priests, the Lord's ministers, sounding with his trumpets.^b So many and so great are our privileges, above most other nations, that it may justly be expected, I wish it could be as justly said, *Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.*^c

2. Let us particularly be thankful to God, for the forms of sound words, both ancient and modern, which we have among us; for our catechisms and confessions of faith; that we have plenty of them, and variety of them, not clashing and contradicting each other, but rather confirming and illustrating each other; for to Christ they all with one consent bear witness, and to the law and to the testimony they all appeal: though the methods be different, they meet in the same centre; and tend to direct those of different tastes and capacities to it likewise.

3. Let parents and governors of families make

conscience of instructing their children, and servants, in the forms of sound words. Here this work must begin, for it must begin betimes; *Whom shall he teach knowledge? Whom shall he make to understand doctrine?* The prophet there answers, *Them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts:*^a when they are very young, under the immediate care of their mothers or grandmothers, as Timothy was: they are the teachers of babes.^b When Solomon was tender, and only-beloved in the sight of his mother,^c she taught him.^d The history of the Scripture is most proper to acquaint your children with in the first place; we see how soon they apprehend, and are affected, with other stories, and why may not impressions be made upon them as soon by the Scripture stories. Pleasant and profitable instructions may also be given to children by the psalms for singing, and by divine poems and verses suited to their capacity.

It will be of great use likewise to your children, to be told betimes, what it is supposed natural for them to ask, *What we mean by this and the other religious service.*^e Tell them why you read the Bible with so much veneration: because it is the book of God, and holy men wrote the several parts of it, as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. Tell them why you make conscience of praying to God so solemnly every day: because you have a necessary and constant dependence upon God, and upon his providence and grace, that you are daily receiving mercy from him, and daily need his favour. Tell them why you observe the Lord's day, and make such a difference between that and other days; that it is in remembrance of the creation of the world, the resurrection of Christ, and the pouring out of the Spirit. Especially tell them of their baptism; take all opportunities to let them see children baptized, (in order to which it is very good to have it done publicly,) and tell them, thus they were baptized in their infancy, and by that solemnity *dedicated and devoted to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*; and what was done for them then, they must now do for themselves. Tell them of the corruption of their nature, which needed cleansing; and of the grace of God in Christ, in which there is a cleansing virtue.

Set them to learn their catechism; let them commit some portions of Scripture to memory, as you find they are able to do it; and examine them, what they can remember of the sermons they hear. You will meet with some difficulty herein from the corruption of their nature, which you must endeavour to get over as much as may be by a gentle hand; give them instruction with all possible freedom and familiarity, with compassion and condescension to their capacity. *Those teach these things most dili-*

^a Matt. xiii. 16, 17. ^b Rom. iii. 2. ^c 2 Chron. xiii. 12.
^d Deut. iv. 6. ^e Isa. xxviii. 9.

^a Rom. ii. 20.
^b Prov. xxxi. 1.

^c Prov. iv. 3.
^d Exod. xii. 25.

gently to their children, not who are the most dictatorial in doing it, and make the greatest noise, but who talk of them *frequently*; when they sit in the house, and walk by the way, when they lie down, and when they rise up,^f frequently dropping good instructions among their children: and if but one in ten insensibly slip into their minds, and fasten there, what good proficients may we hope they will be in time. Contrive how to make this work, as much as may be, a pleasure and delight to your children and servants, and not a task, or a terror, or a drudgery. Teach them as Christ teaches, who is meek and lowly in heart.

4. Let the ministers of Christ look upon themselves as under a charge to feed the lambs of Christ's flock. All the reformed churches make this a part of their work; to be done either publicly or privately; either in their solemn religious assemblies, or in meetings on purpose for this work; or in visiting their families, either by themselves, or, as in some churches abroad, by some other proper persons qualified for, and deputed to, this service particularly. Private catechising has the advantage of a more particular application to the persons catechised: public catechising has the advantage of a more general edification; and therefore both should be used in their season, or that which, all circumstances considered, may turn to the best account.

O that we who are ministers, were filled with a zeal for the spiritual welfare and eternal salvation of young people, and a concern for the rising generation; and were to do our utmost as our ability and opportunity is, to fill the minds of young ones, in their early days, with the knowledge of Christ, and to fix them for Christ, that the next generation may be better than this. And O that those who are employed in public catechising, may see of the travail of their souls to their satisfaction, and not labour in vain!

5. Let us look with pity upon the great numbers of children, even in our own land, who are not taught these forms of sound words, but are bred up in ignorance and profaneness; strangers and enemies to Christ and true Christianity. *They are poor, they are foolish, they know not the way of the Lord, nor the judgment of their God.^g* They sit in darkness in a land of light, and walk on in darkness, and if infinite mercy do not interpose to prevent, they are hastening into utter darkness. If you can do any thing, sirs, have compassion upon them and help them; pick up some of those neglected, abandoned young ones, you who have ability, and rescue them from ruin, by putting them into a way of receiving instruction. We have charity schools set up in the city and country; which, if managed by the rules of catholic Christianity, have a direct tendency to

the bettering of the world, and the reforming of the next age, if the reforming of this should be despaired of. What is given to the support and encouragement of them, is charity, both to soul and body, and will be fruit abounding to your account.

6. Let those who have heard and learned the forms of sound words long ago, retain them still, and improve more and more. I have reason to think I speak to many who were blessed with a good education, were trained up in the way wherein they should go: I beseech you examine yourselves, not only whether you have not departed from it, I hope you have not quite deserted it, but what progress have you made in it? What have you built upon that foundation? Has it been wood, hay, and stubble;^h airy notions, nice speculations, perverse disputings, and strifes of words? or has it been gold, silver, and precious stones; advances in serious godliness, in holiness, and heavenly mindedness, and the power of that kingdom of God, which is not meat or drink, but *righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost?*ⁱ Go on and prosper, for the Lord is with you. But if you have in any degree let go that good thing which was committed to your trust, I beseech you bethink yourselves whence you have fallen, and remember again what you have received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. *Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die.^k*

7. I must not part without a word to you, whose request brought me to this service here to-day, you who are catechised in the principles of religion, that you may grow yet more and more in the knowledge of Christ and Christianity.

(1.) Carefully attend to the instructions that are given you; and treasure them up, with sincerity, and all the marks of reverence and seriousness. Give attendance on, and attention to, what is taught you, and set your heart to it. You must take pains, else you cannot expect to reap advantage; for it is in labour that there is profit. Be careful to mark what is said, not critical to make remarks upon it; and give account of it with affection, but without affectation; and attend here not for ostentation, because you think yourselves better than others, but for your edification, because you would be better than you are.

(2.) Pray over what is taught you, and beg of God to bless it to you. Man can but teach the outward ear, it is God only that can bring it to the heart, and in that respect none teach like him. It is he who teaches with a strong hand,^l and then the teaching is effectual; who seals the instruction,^m and then it is abiding; who gives the understanding, and opens the heart. Look up to him therefore by faithful and fervent prayer, for that grace of his which is necessary to your profiting by the means of grace. You

^f Deut. vi. 7. ^g Jer. v. 4. ^h 1 Cor. iii. 12. ⁱ Rom. xiv. 17.

^k Rev. iii. 2, 3.

^l Isa. viii. 11.

^m Job xxxiii. 16.

crave his blessing upon the food for your body, that it may be nourishing to you; and can you expect your spiritual food should nourish you without that blessing, or that you should have that blessing, if you do not pray for it? That good thing which is by the word committed to you to keep for God, do you by prayer commit to God to keep for you, and bring it to your minds when you should use it.

(3.) Live as those who by attendance on such an exercise as this, make a profession of religion above many others. Hereby you seem to be more solicitous about your souls, and more inquisitive concerning the way to heaven, than your neighbours; but what will it avail you that you seem to be so, unless you be really so? The tree will be known by its fruits. Evidence that you receive not so much instruction in vain, by the exemplary purity and piety, seriousness and strictness, of your whole conversation. By

your justice and charity, and unshaken veracity and fidelity; your sobriety and temperance; your humility and meekness; your conscientious obedience to your parents and masters, and a steady course of godliness and honesty; you ought to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour. I remember Epictetus—pressing his pupil to show by his practice of virtue, his profiting by the instructions given him—illustrates it by this similitude: “The sheep,” says he, “do not come to their shepherd, and show him how much meat they have eaten, but they make it to appear by their growing fatter and fitter for use.” Thus, therefore, do you make it appear, that you improve in Christian knowledge, *by the agreeableness and evenness of your Christian practice, and your perseverance in it to the end*, that you and we may rejoice, in the day of the Lord, that we have not run in vain, nor laboured in vain.